

HUMOURS OF A PEAT COMMISSION

BY

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T. & J. MANSON

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE TO VOLUME III.

WITH the publication of this, the third volume, *The Humours of a Peat Commission* is now complete. The publishers regret that so long a period has elapsed between the issue of the second and third volumes; but several circumstances have made this delay unavoidable. From many enquiries received, they are led to believe that readers of the first two volumes will welcome the publication of the third.

T. & J. MANSON.

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CHAPTER XLIV.

Betty and Mary go to Lerwick and make heavy purchases.

WEDNESDAY came, the post arrived and was delivered; the parcel post was distributed; but there were no signs of the long-looked-for parcels for the Tittie and Madam.

"The dresses have not come," said the latter. "Isn't that awful, after them promising so faithfully to send them. Whatever will we do?"

"Do? Du as I said da streen. Geng ta da toon fur dem yoursells," said the P.M.

"Yes, but suppose they are not ready when we get there. What then?"

"Heth, I widna be surprised at dat. I peety dis dressmaakers more as ony idder kind o folk at haes ta wirk. It widna be sae bad if dey hed ta mak dresses fur men, fur men is more moaderat an raesonable, an no sae perteeclar. Bit dis weemen. Aless everything is fitted laek a glive, dir no plaesin o dem. Dis 'ill be ower slack, or da oxter 'ill be ower ticht, or dan shu dusna hing richt, or dan shu's lower at the front as da back, or dir a lirk i da left side; or somethin—dir alwis somethin. An dan da dressmaaker objects taks on sae muckle at dey canna get troo da wark, fur weemen is everlastingly wantin somethin or idder; so its nae winder at da frocks is no ready. Dats nothin new. Feth, I mind I wis

wance at a weddin whaar da bride's dress wisna ready half-a-oor afore da time at shu wis ta be mairied. An whin it did come, it cam in bits. I' da ben end ye could see nothin bit weemen wi' preens in dir mooths tryin ta get da boady o it wupid about her, ta mak some kind o appearance. An heth, dey maniged no sae bad. Da bride got in juist in time, kind o rid i da face, an no lookin aata-gedder plaesed, ye kno. Bit shu got mairied, an dat wis da main thing."

"That's all very fine," said the Tittie. "But we don't want to be wupid in wi' preens, as you call it. We want our dresses properly finished, down to the last stitch."

"Weel, as I said, ye'll hae ta geng an see aboot dem yoursells, dan. If I wis you, I wid juist go ta da place, geng in an turn da key i' da door whaar da dressmaakers wirk, an sit an wait intil ye got dem. Dat's da only wye ta du it. If I hed time, I wid come wi you mesell, an heth I kno I wid get da dresses some wye."

"We don't want them 'some wye,' though. We want them complete."

"Weel, my jewel, I hoop ye get dem. I' da meantime, till your ready, I'se go an get da motor an go ower fur Betty and Mary. I expec dir ready waitin. Betty is juist in a aet ta geng ta Lerrick an get yon bit o furnatir, an Mary is no muckle better."

Within an hour the P.M. was back with the wife of his bosom and Mary. Both were dressed with care and taste. Betty wasn't one of those who liked to "cut a dash"; and although Mary had reason-

able ambition in this direction, her parent would allow her to wear nothing but what she considered quiet and in keeping with her position.

"Mrs Laurenson, we are just delighted to think you and Mary are coming to Lerwick with us. Fancy us having to go a special journey to the town to fetch two frocks. They should have been here, this morning, according to promise, you know."

"Da dressmaakers is laekly no been able ta get dem ready in time. Bit ye mann hae dresses fur da weddin, dir nae doot o dat. Tink ye will ye get dem whin ye're got ta da toon?"

"We are devoutly hoping so."

"See you here, my leddies," interposed the P. M., "du ye tink its safe fur ye fower wemeen ta geng ta da toon yoursells, ithoot a man ta look efter you?"

"You hear that, Mrs Laurenson."

"Yae, I hear. I'm heard loks o things i mi life."

"Yes, but, you know, really," said the high-heeler, "I do think a gentleman should accompany us. Anything might happen on the road. I hardly think it's safe, myself, for us to go alone."

"Du you think Mr D. wid geng?"

"He's playing golf," said the Tittie, while Madam blushed to the roots of her hair at the mention of Mr D.'s name.

"Mr H. nicht geng, dan. He's lyin up yonder at da back o da hotel readin. Mr H.! Mr H.!" called Jerry, when it was the Tittie's turn to blush.

"Hillo, what's up?" said that gentleman, who strolled towards the party, pipe in mouth.

“ Du ye think ye’re fit ta geng to Lerrick ta look efter dis fower weemen ? ”

“ With the greatest of pleasure. But when are they coming back ? Doesn’t the great event, the wedding, come off to-morrow ? ”

“ Dat’s exakly what dir gaen ta da toon about. Ye see, dis twa haes naethin ta——”

“ Be quiet, will you,” whispered the Tittie, coming close up to the P. M. “ Do you think we want the whole world to know that we are going to the town for dresses ? ”

“ I’m shure, ye needna be ashamed o dat. Every person haes ta be cled, altho raelyly dir some o dis lasses at goes aboot half——”

“ Will you be quiet. You really are an awful person.”

“ Weel, my jewel, I’se say nae mair. Aa at I’m anxeeous aboot is at ye come ta nae hairm ; an of coorse I kno at ye’ll feel mair comfortable in your mind whin ye hae a man wi you. Dat wis what da men wis made fur, ye ken—ta look after da weemen.”

“ A nice job they make of it, some of them. It’s all the other way about, I think.”

“ So. Ye’ll better get in, an tak him aside you, an gie him a shance. Noo, ye’re aa in noo, stowed away no sae bad. Dir juist wan thing I hae ta say. If onything comes at you on da rod, or if da car braks doon, or if ony o you faas ill, or if onything happens, juist telegraph ta me, an I’ll hae a motor aside you in twartree meenits. An if ye buy mair as ye can kerry comin back, whidder licht or heavy, or if ye tink at ye need me ta gie da dress-

maakers a bit o mi mind, juist telegraph tu, an I'll shune be aside you wi anidder motor, or twa, if dir needid. So; aff you go, an da Loard go wi you."

As the motor disappeared from sight, the P. M. went to a seat outside the hotel and sat down and lit his pipe. "Dir gone. Feth, dir wan thing, noo at Betty is on da amp fur rinnin aboot in motors, an gotten in a aet ower furnatir, its not ta be sayin what'll happen. Wance shu's tastid blod, as da man said, its hard ta say what da end 'ill be. Shu'll be wantin a new hoose ta pit da new furnatir in, I widna winder. An dan Mary. What tink ye o Mary? Shu's efter a piana. I can see dat. Heth, if da midder buys yon sheffaneer thing an Mary a piana, forby laekly more, dey'll be sendin a lorry nort wi da things—a motor 'ill not do. An whaar 'ill dey go? I see no place i wir habitation bit da barn. Dan, my Jerry, dir 'ill be twa Sundays i da week. Du'll hae ta pu doon an build greater, laek da man i da Scriptor. So. Money wis made roond, and roond shu goes. Dir nae doot aboot dat. Keep a hould on her you cant. Weel, weel, ye canna tak it wi you; an if dir set dir minds ipun da things, I suppose dey'll juist hae ta get dem. Aa da sam, da money I got is aboot don. Man, dis is fine wadder, an dis pipe is goin fine."

The motor reached the town without mishap. During the journey Betty was firmly convinced in her own mind that a special Providence was protecting her, and the other occupants of the car; for although she was sure the motors she frequently saw coming from the opposite direction would crash into their's, they miraculously passed without touching;

and as they passed carts, lorries and cycles without smashing into them, her conviction became the more deeply rooted. By the time that Gremista hove in sight, she had grown somewhat accustomed to the speed, and was in a resigned frame of mind regarding risks, having put herself in the hands of a Higher Power. It was only when the car had reached Skibbadock that a word escaped her lips.

"Dis is no Lerrick ye're gaen til."

"Lerwick? Certainly this is Lerwick," answered the Tittie.

"Its no da Lerrick at I kent. No, no. Dir wis nae hooses here whin I wis i da toon last. An siccan hooses as dey ir. Dear wan! Bits o widden sheds. Is dis fur folk?"

"Oh, yes; a lot of people live here, I assure you."

"Dear-a-dear. Dis is aa different," Betty said, as the car spun in over North Commercial Road. "Dey wirna mony hooses here in my young days. Noo its aa hooses. What shanges!"

"Don't you see anything you recognise?"

"Yae, dir een or twa places I du mind; bit we're gaen at sic a rate a body haes nae time ta look. Here's da Gerrison. It's not muckle schanged. An what's yon rod alang da shore?"

"That's the Esplanade. Have you not seen that before?"

"I, I; no I. Less-a-less. An da harbour croodid wi ships. Whaars aa da Dutchmen at wis wint to be here at dis time o year?"

"Oh, they haven't been here since the war broke out, you see."

"I see. Laekly no. Fur sic sights. Dear-a-me."

"Here we are at the Grand," said Mr H.
"We get out here, I understand."

"We do. We are here for the afternoon and evening only, so we will put up here," said Miss G.

"Midder, faider said at we wir ta geng ta da ludgin we wir at whin he wis i da toon, so we'll better geng ower noo," said Mary.

"Yes, Mary, that's all right," said Miss F.
"But your mother and you have to promise to come along and have tea with us at five o'clock. After lunch we will go and interview the dressmakers and see how things stand. Then we will have a cup of tea together and report progress. You promise, now?"

"Thank you, Miss. Ye're ower kind. Bit I dunna think at we could come ta dis graand place an sit doon wi you."

"Stuff and nonsense. Mary, bring your mother along. Be sure you don't forget. Five o'clock. I will be on the outlook for you."

Arrived at the "ludgin," Mary and her mother were made welcome as much for Jerry's and Joanie's sake as for their own, and were speedily made to feel at home. After a nice dinner, enquiry was made as to the whereabouts of the auctioneer who had the chiffonier for sale, the article of furniture on which Betty had set her mind. Mary, who knew the town to a certain extent, professed herself able to find the place after the landlady had told her where it was.

"Ye can aye aks," remarked that individual

as the two left the room. "Dir alwis folk aboot at 'ill shaw you."

Mary and her mother ventured forth and went north along the street, the latter quietly yet carefully noting everything on the way. The bustle, life, and constant motion seemed to perturb and rather frighten her; but she allowed no sign of this to appear. After a few questions put by Mary, the pair found themselves in the saleroom and face to face with the auctioneer himself.

"We were tould you hed a chiffonier for sale, if you please."

"I do. A first-class chiffonier it is too. Rosewood, mahogany fittings inside, two compartments, one long drawer, beautifully carved. A splendid article."

"What were ye askin fur it? "

"The price of furniture just now is excessive, my dear madam, — twice as much as what it was four years ago. I am offering that chiffonier dirt cheap at £15 10/-. I believe if I exposed it for sale it would fetch a good deal more."

"Dats a aafil penny."

"It may be, but everything is awful just now."

"Tink ye wid ye no gie it fur twal pound? "

"Impossible; quite impossible. I'm telling you it's cheap—thrown away at fifteen ten."

"Weel, I dunna ken. Hoo wid we get it hom, even suppose I took it," said Betty, who immensely admired the handsome piece of furniture, and had made up her mind to have it at almost any price. She considered it a sacred principle, however, "ta beat da man doon."

"Where do you live?"

"In Eshaness."

"That's easy. Send it to Scalloway, and the steamer will take it to Hillswick, and there you are."

"Yae, bit look at da freight o dat. Ye'll gie it fur fourteen pound, shurly."

"No, I'm sorry. I might go the length of taking off the ten shillings, but no farther."

"Weel, since it is sae, alto its a aafil penny, we'll tak it. An will ye pack it an send it ta Scallowa?"

"I can't do that. That's a job for a cabinet-maker."

"An whaar may he be fun?"

"Oh, we'll direct you to him all right. I expect he'll want a pound for box and packing."

"Bliss my boady! What a place for money."

"Then the carting to Scalloway will likely be another ten shillings, and the freight to Hillswick. You can reckon on another two pounds, madam, at any rate."

"Dear wan. Fifteen pound is your lowest, dan."

"It is."

"Weel, here's da money."

"Midder, midder," whispered May, "aks him da price o dis piana."

"Lass, lass, is du oot o dee raeson? Whaar can we pit a piana, an hoo can we pey fur it? Mi money is nearly don already. What wid dee faider say if we cam hom wi dis sheffaneer an a piana? He wid go oot o his mind."

“ No he. Never mind dat. Juist aks.”

“ We wir windring whats da price o dis piana.”

“ The piano? Oh. That’s the one real bargain—I mean considering present-day prices—I have in the premises. It is a bargain. A first-class Collard and Collard, iron frame, tri-chord throughout, check action, ivory keys, rosewood case, in perfect order. Try it. The young lady plays, of course? ”

“ Na, she canna play muckle yit.”

“ Well, you can take my word for it that there’s not two pianos in Shetland to equal it. List price sixty-five guineas. Now absolutely thrown away at thirty-one pound ten. Was out on hire for only one month, and I happend to pick it up just by a fluke. If you pass this chance, you can take it from me that you will never have another like it. Three parties have already been looking at it, and I fully expect it will be sold to-morrow.”

“ Therty-wan pound ten, did you say? ”

“ That’s the figure, madam, and thrown away at the money. The instrument would set-off any drawing-room in the land.”

While Betty was reflecting that she had no drawing-room a brilliant idea struck Mary. She was as determined to have the piano as her mother had been to have the chiffonier, and she knew that the money could be forthcoming somehow. She also had an idea that by a little addition to the bend of the house, accommodation could be provided for the instrument. “ Try an baet him doon some till I come back,” she whispered to her mother, as she left the room.

The P. M. had just had his dinner and was sitting outside enjoying a "rook," the fine weather, and peace, when a telegram was put into his hands.

"Loard's mercy, what's wrang noo? Dir somethin happened ta dem. Da motor been smashed, an Betty killed, or maybe Mary or da Tittie. Dear wan."

With trembling hands he opened the envelope and read—

"Can get great bargain of splendid piano Collard and Collard only thirty pound. Cost seventy. Can I buy. Reply immediate. Mary."

"I tould you dat. It was shurly wan evil day whin I lat dat pair go ta da toon. I'll be ruined. I see dat plain. Therty pound! Da lass spaeks o therty pound as if it wis nothin. An reply immediate, too. Hoo can I reply immediate? Dis 'ill need ta be toucht aboot, my lamb at du is. Therty pound! an I mind buying a fiddle fur fower-an-sax ta wan o da boys. Bit of coorse he wis a boy. Da lass is not wise, dats clear. Therty pound?"

CHAPTER XLV.

The P. M. groans over "da extravagance o dis weemen. Thirty pound fur wan piana!"

"Its aa very weel," said the P. M. to himself, "my Mary, ta spaek o therty pound. Bit therty pound is some money, even whin a body's wages is, as I'm said, no sae bad. Therty pound! Mony is da year I didna aern as muckle, an haed ta pirvide fur da faimly oot o it, alto Loard knows hoo it wis don, fur I dont. Bit we got troo some wye, tanks ta Him. An dan da lass ta say shu can buy a piana fur only therty pound! Its only therty pound, mind you, juist as if I hed hunders ta fire awey, an twinty an therty wis nothin to spaek o. Oh dis weemen. Dere's da pair, noo, i da toon, da wan wi her mind on wan thing an da idder on da tidder. Noo, aa at I boucht fur mesell wis things ta cled me richt an daecent, ta be somethin laek da rest o dem, an I wisna very anxeeous aboot it eddern, fur I hae no laekin fur makin a blow an a show. Bit what dir efter is mair pride an vaenity as onything else."

"Any bad news?" a voice close at his side asked.

"Oh, dis is you, Mr E? Do you know ye kind o startled me."

"I'm sorry; but I saw the telegram in your hand and you sitting in what you would term a very dis—dis—dis——"

“ -Jaskid.”

“ Yes, that’s the word. Disjaskid attitude. I thought something serious had happened to the party who left for town this morning.”

“ Na, na, dir nothin serious; bit——”

“ But what? ”

“ Weel, do you know what Mary is doin? ”

“ Nothing out of the way, I’m sure.”

“ I don know aboot dat. It aa depends hoo you look at it. Shu’s efter buying a piana, do you know dat? ”

“ I am not surprised at that. In fact, I would have been very much surprised had she not set her mind on having a piano. It’s the most natural thing in the world. Mary has likely inherited some of your musical gifts and tastes, and naturally she wishes to cultivate them. My opinion of Mary has risen, though I have had a high opinion of her since she first came among us, seeing she wishes to cultivate music. The wish to possess a piano and be able to play it hows that Mary has refinement of mind. And is she asking your permission to buy it? ”

“ Shu’s aksin fur da money ta pay fur it, dats worse. I can shune gie permission. Money is a different maitter aatagedder. An do you know what shu says? ”

“ No.”

“ Shu says da piana is only therty pound.”

“ Thirty pound for a piano! My dear sir, if the piano is worth anything, if it is by a good maker, it is worth that and more.”

"Oh, heth, shu gies da maaker's name. Here's da telegraph."

"A Collard and Collard! Cost seventy; only thirty pounds. My dear Mr Laurensen, if I were in your place, I would jump at such a bargain. Collard and Collard is one of the very best makers in Britain, and what is more, English. Several of my friends have their instruments, and I know they are universally prized. If Mary has a desire to develop her artistic proclivities, it is very important that she should have a good instrument to practice on."

"Dat's aa very good, an maybe aa very true; bit dir twa things ta be considered. Therty pound is a lok a mony fur a man laek me; an dan, whaar ir we gaen ta pit da thing whin it comes? Dats what I wid laek ta ken. Dir nae room in wir habitation fur a great big piana; an heth, do you know, at Betty is efter a piece o furnatir as grit—a chiffonier, I tink shu caad it."

"I am not surprised at that either. Your wife has fine natural taste, and artistic leanings; and it is but natural, now that she has better opportunity, of giving expression to her feelings in tangible form. That's one of the penalties which artistic natures have to pay—they are always seeking after something higher, better, different from the ordinary affairs of hum-drum life."

"Yiss, nae doot, bit dey sood pey fur it dem-sells dan, an no come ta idder folk."

"But surely, Mr Laurensen, now that you have some means at your disposal, you would never grudge your wife and daughter things like these—a

beautiful piece of furniture and an instrument which can be a source of joy to both player and listener. I know if I was in your position, the husband of a charming wife and the father of fine children—I wish I was—it would be my greatest delight to help them develop their artistic leanings.”

“ Maybe. I widna say. Dey say a aald maid’s bairns is aye weel brought up. I ken nothin’ aboot bachelor’s eens. Laekly dir da sam. Feth, I’m no paid oot muckle fur my artistic development, as ye caa it, mair as buyin a book o sangs noo an agen an usin da voice at da Loard gae me. Why canna dis weemen be content wi dir voice, an laeve dis expensive instramints alon? ”

“ That’s impossible. The world is full of beauty; and we must all make the best use of everything in art and nature that surrounds us. But you will have to reply to the telegram. You cannot keep the poor girl waiting on tenter hooks all this time.”

“ Weel, therty pound I will not pey, edder fur Mary or ony idder body. I juist hae twinty tree pound haandy, an if shu canna get da instramint fur dat, shu’ll hae ta want. Da man is laekly aksin o’wer muckle, an shu can baet him doon. Bit whaar’s da thing ta go? ”

“ Oh, that’s simple. You can build an annexe to your house at a cost of fifty pounds or so, a nice little parlour, where both the chifionier and the piano can be put, and any other things the ladies will gradually add. That need not trouble you.”

“ Heth, ye aa spaek of thirty an fifty pound as if it wis dirt. I expec at bi da time da tree monts

is up an wir seleries paid, at I'll be as poor as I wis whin we began."

"Well, well, 'sufficient for the day,' you know. You go to the Post Office and wire Mary the money. She must be wondering by this time that no reply has been received."

Rather reluctantly, it must be confessed, the father of Mary got up and did as he was bid. He sent off this telegram:—

"Sending twenty-three pound. No more.
Piano too dear. J. Laurenson."

"If shu canna baet da man doon seeven pound, shu's not a woman, dats aall at I'll say. An if shu comes hom ithoot her, sae muckle da better. Betty's piece o furnatir 'ill be plenty at wan time."

Mary received the telegram and opened it with anxious haste. At first her face fell when she saw the amount sent; but she revived when she reflected that she had five pounds with her which she could put in on the purchase price. This brought the available sum to within three pounds of the price asked. After receiving the money at the Post Office, Mary returned to the charge.

"You say you canna gie da piana under thirty-wan pound."

"That's the figure."

"I only hae twinty-eight. Tink ye could ye no gie if fur dat? We hae ta tak it a lang piece hame, and dat 'ill be mair expense."

"Excuse me," said the auctioneer, "I think you said you came from Eshaness?"

"Dat's wir place," replied Betty.

“Do you happen to know the Laurenson family—the family of Mr Jerry Laurenson, the Practical Member of the famous Peat Commission?”

“We’re his family. I’m his wife, an dis is wir dochter.”

“You, you yourself, his wife, and this is his daughter! My dear ladies, let me shake your hands. I have such a feeling of respect for Mr Laurenson, the P. M., that I could never do enough for him. Really, this is a most unexpected pleasure. And how is he? How is Mr Laurenson?”

“Oh, he’s fine.”

“I am very glad to hear it. Now, just to show my respect for him, and for you as well, and as a sort of tribute to his abilities and character, I will willingly give the three pounds off the piano. The transaction leaves nothing to myself; but I am quite willing to forego any profit just to show my feelings for your husband, Mrs Laurenson.”

“Thenk you, sir; bit we widna laek ta tink at ye hed naethin aff o it.”

“Don’t mention it. I’ll do more. I’ll see to the packing and sending off of both the piano and the chifionier. The charges can be put in one account and sent to Mr Laurenson. But, by the bye, Miss, Miss—

“Mary is her name.”

“Miss Mary. A beautiful name, Mary. I was going to say that now that you have got a piano, you must also get a piano stool. A piano is of little use unless you have a proper seat.”

“Couldna a shair du?” asked Mary’s mother.

“Oh, a chair could do, no doubt, in a way. But a proper stool is required for the full development of a player’s abilities. In high piano-playing, you know, a player’s movements must in no way be impeded by such a thing as the arms or back of a chair. Pianists have sometimes to stretch their arms first to one side and then to the other, lift them above their head, and wave them about—they must have elbow-room, in short, so that they can come down on the keys with that resounding crash which is such an evidence of intense feeling, and which makes audiences gasp and shiver. A pianist sitting in a chair has no freedom of action; and as you know from the P. M.’s performances, action, appropriate action, is essential for the proper interpretation of a piece. I have no doubt that very soon Miss Mary will be able to charm the whole Northmavine district with her playing on this splendid piano—more particularly if she has a proper stool to sit on.”

“What’s da price o it.”

“Only thirty-five shillings. Screws up and down to suit the size of the player, the mood she is in, or the piece she is playing. It is also a music cabinet for holding music and keeping it nicely. Nothing gets soiled and torn so soon as music; and music is expensive.”

“I tink we’ll tak it tu,” said Mary.

“Thank you. You will find that it will be of the greatest assistance to you in your practice and playing. I will just send it with the other things. Oh, Mrs Laurenson, just one minute before you go.

I want to show you, just because it is a beautiful thing, and a thing I know you would like to see—not that I am asking you to buy it, although it is for sale—this fine settee. Green plush, strong, handsome carved frame, in perfect order. Harmonises most beautifully with the chiffonier. There is nothing more grateful to a person who has been working all morning than to lie down and rest on a settee. It soothes the wearied body, and refreshes the—the—the—spirit. Now, I can just imagine in my mind's eye a nice little room with this piano and stool, the chiffonier, the settee, three or four nice chairs, a carpet, bright fender and fire-irons, and a few pictures on the walls. That's the sort of room people of taste and refinement wish for. That is people who have souls and aspirations."

"Its a boany bit o furnatir, truly," said Betty, whose soul was melted within her at the sight of the settee. "What ir ye aksin fur it?"

"Only five pound ten. Cost ten guineas. Owner selling at a sacrifice because it is unsuitable for the particular corner of a certain room. Except the piano, there is nothing I have equal to it as a bargain."

"You could shurly tak aff da ten shillins?"

"Impossible; but I'll see it packed safely for you, and sent with the other things. There is no need, I may tell you, for you to pay the money just now. Mr Laurensen's name is quite sufficient. I'll just get the costs of packing and freight, and along with the price of the article, put it all on one account and send it to your address."

"Weel, dat wid certainly be haandy, fur I dunna hae ower muckle money wi me, an I hae som things ta get da nicht yit. Bit you mann address da letter ta me, ye ken, no ta him. An ye can pit da piana stool on da sam account."

"Right o. I'll attend to all that. You can rely on me. Yes. You were speaking of a carpet?"

"Na, I tink we'll buy naethin mair een noo. Maybe whin we're i' da toon agen we'll come alang. We'll hae to be goin, fur we hae ta geng hom da nicht. Ye'll get da things sent as shune as you can?"

"Certainly. Well, good day; and will you give my warmest regards to Mr Laurenson. I am glad to see that he and all the other members of the Peat Commission are keeping well with all the hard work they are doing. The amount of brain work and physical toil they are putting in in getting evidence about peats in Shetland must be a very severe strain upon them. Take care of Mr Laurenson, Mrs Laurenson. We would all be sorry if anything came at the P. M."

"Thank you, sir. I'se du dat. Come awa, Mary. What's yon at du's lookin at?"

As the pair left the room, the auctioneer sat down and smiled. "Not a bad morning's work. Piano, £28; chiffonier, £14; settee, £5 10/-; stool, £1 15/-—altogether £49 5/-. I think, although I gave a little off, I'll screw 25 per cent. out of the transaction. Then they'll be back here within a month sure, certain, for a carpet, chairs, fender and fire-irons, a hearthrug, and some pictures—say

about £14 10/-. Oh, a little over £60. That's not much for a well-furnished room. A man with £2000 a year and all expenses paid can well afford that. I expect the trouble will be where to put the stuff. Crofters' ben ends are not usually large enough to stow such a lot of extra furniture. The P. M. will have to build. That's what you'll have to do, Mr L. Now, let me see. If I have my head on, I might do something there also. I might go and see him just after the things arrive, point out that unless a place is provided for them, they will go to wreck; suggest how the addition to the house should be made; help him with getting a plan and estimate; and arrange to supply the material. Just you leave it to me, Mr L. I'll do the thing for you. What is wanted in this world is to have your head screwed on right."

"What wis yon at du wis lookin at afore we cam oot o da room," asked her mother of Mary.

"Oh, midder, dir wis juist a lovely carpet and fower shairs da very kind at I laek. We canna set a piana an a shiffonier an a sofa on a bare flüre."

"Bare flüre! I wid laek ta ken what bare flüre we hae ta set dem ipun. Noo, hed it no been fur dy madrim aboot dis piana, we could a maniged weel anof. Da chest o drawers could a been pitten i da peerie room atween da but an da ben, an da shiffonier could a gone in her place i da ben end."

"An whaar wid ye pit da sofa, I wid laek ta ken."

"Weel, of coorse dir no muckle room, I know, bit I wid a maniged. Bit wi dis piana, da thing is oot o da whestin aatagedder. I dont know what

dee faider 'ill say whin he sees aa dis furnatir comin ta da hoose. It canna staand ootside, an it canna go i da byre; an it wid be a boanie story fur da folk ta hear at we hed been i da toon an boucht lods o furnatir an aa da place we hae ta pit it is i da barn."

"Weel, I must hae da piana hom. Faider kens aboot her. He sent da monev fur her, an he'll look fur her."

"I don't know what ta say. Da piana an da stool 'ill tak up maist o da room o' da ben end; an ta get dem in, we'll hae ta pit some things but. Aa I see fur it is ta tell da men no ta send da idder things intil we get a place ta pit dem. Somethin 'ill hae ta be done ta mak da ben end bigger, dats sure an certain."

Although Betty was a douce, quiet, unostentatious woman, and one who had a natural dislike for vulgar display, it must be confessed that she felt a natural thrill of pride in conjuring up in her mind's eye a nice room, larger than the ben end, set out with the furniture she and Mary had purchased. Visions of having Mrs Maikomson and some neighbours in to tea in the parlour with Mary playing the "Angel's Whisper" on the piano, floated before her; and it was a great satisfaction to reflect that when the minister called, she could show him into this room, where he would see all around him evidence of culture. The only thing that troubled her was to see how these natural ambitions could be speedily gratified. Jerry, she knew, would growl and grumble, and say they were out of their senses; but she felt she had the ability to get over this obstacle. What lay heaviest on her mind was the

difficulty of getting the enlargement made quickly. She would like it done at once; but she knew this was impossible. All the same, she made up her mind that it must be set about without delay.

While this was passing through Betty's mind, her eye caught sight of an attractive array of crockery in a shop window. As one evil deed leads to another, so Betty's quest for furniture led her into paths she had never dreamed of. She reflected that if in this fine new room she had in her mind's eye she would be in a position to entertain her neighbours, the means wherewith to do so in proper fashion had to be provided. A tea set of good china was therefore indispensable. After she and Mary had had a good look at the varied assortment, so temptingly displayed, the pair entered the shop. "It wis shurely wan evil day," as Jerry said, "at dat twa hed gone ta da toon." Jerry was to find out the truth of this later on.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Betty and Mary make more purchases.

“ YE hae some shina, some tea things, i da window yunder, I see,” said Betty to the youngish man at the counter of the shop she and Mary entered.

“ We do. We have some very nice tea sets. That’s a very good one indeed, a beautiful pattern, and first-rate quality.”

“ It ’ill be dear, dan? ”

“ Well, it is that way. But a good thing, you know, is always worth the money.”

“ What’s da price o it? ”

“ The set in the window is four pound, five shillings.”

“ Dat’s aafil dear.”

“ We have cheaper sets, though. I can show you a variety of sets at lower prices than that. Will you just please step upstairs?”

During this soliloquy Mary’s eyes were not idle. She had a look round the shop, and saw several things which she knew would be very useful, and would materially assist in housekeeping. She said nothing, however, in the meantime, but merely made a mental note of the various articles.

Arrived upstairs, the ladies were left to be attended to by the assistant there, who, having been informed of their wants, showed them several pat-

terns and styles of tea things at prices ranging from £2 to £3 15/-.

After a good deal of looking, some whispering between Betty and Mary as to shape and patterns, it was decided to purchase a set at £2 10/-.

"Dats your lowest price?" asked Betty.

"That's the price, but we might give a shilling or so off for cash down. I'll see."

In a few minutes the girl came back and said that the cash price was £2 7/6; but that if the china had to be packed for sending anywhere the full price would have to be charged.

"Yae, it 'ill hae to be packed, very weel tu, I tell you, fur it haes ta geng a lang wye."

"Well, we'll pack it and send it to any address you give."

"Ye'll hae efternune tea-sets tu?" asked Mary.

"Lass, what's du wantin o efternune tea-sets," whispered her mother. "What need hae we fur da laek o dat?"

"Yon set at you're boucht is juist fur oardnir use," replied Mary in the same tone. "Wir shina is nearly don, an yon's needid fur every day. Bit we must hae somethin richt fur onybody laek da minister's wife, or da teacher, comin alang. Dey alwis hae peerier cups an saacers fur dat."

"Here's a very nice afternoon tea-set," said the girl. "The latest style, and a very nice pattern. Only £2 12/6."

"Dear-a-dear. Dats ower muckle," said Betty.

"Of course you can have the half set, you know, at £1 9/-.

"Weel, dats mair kind o raesonable. Bit I toucht da half o £2 12/6 wis £1 6/3."

"We cannot sell half sets at exactly half price. £1 9/- is only 2/9 more."

"Ye'll pit it up in a box fur wan pound seeven, shurly?"

"No; we can't do that. We'll pack it, though, and make it ready for sending, for £1 9/-.

"Ye're aafilly gude, I most say."

"You'll not be needing afternoon tea-spoons, will you? You likely have them?" asked the girl.

"Weel, I daarsay we'll need twa or tree."

"You get these down-stairs. Come this way."

After having disbursed £3 19/6 upstairs, the pair proceeded to the shop below, where after a good deal of examination and groans at the price, an afternoon set of spoons was purchased, together with half-a-dozen useful spoons for every-day use.

As they were leaving the premises, and had just got outside the door, Mary exclaimed—"Oh, midder!"

"Lass, what is wrang wi dee noo?"

"We're forgotten what we most hev. We most hev it?"

"What's dis noo?"

"Dir harly a daecint knife or fork i da place. Dir juist tree knives, wan o dem broken at da point, an da haandles o dem black as dey can be; an four forks, twa o dem benkled an bent. We most

get knives an forks, whatever we do. Come away back."

The money in Betty's purse was getting pretty low; but examination showed that there was still sufficient left to purchase half-a-dozen knives and forks.

This having been done, and, as Betty said, "all mercifully paid fur," they left the shop, and were standing gazing with keen interest at a draper's window near by, when Mary again ejaculated—

"I kent dir wis somethin."

"Lass, what is wrang wi dee dis day? "

"We'll hae ta geng ta da auctioneer an ask him ta shaa wis da man at's ta pack da piana, fur dir wan perteeklar thing I want ta tell him aboot mesell."

To the auctioneer's Mary dragged her mother, and after explaining what she wanted, that individual sent a boy with them to the cabinetmaker's. In this home of fine furniture, both Mary and her mother could have stayed for hours. Here was everything they needed—all that the heart desired. There were easy chairs of all kinds and sizes; drawing-room, dining-room and bedroom chairs; suites of every variety, style and price; wardrobes, dressing-glasses; and a hundred and one things which appealed to their taste. Betty knew and felt that much of it was not suitable for their habitation; but nevertheless she saw many things which she ardently desired to possess, and which she quietly determined to become the owner of at no distant date. The view of this attractive

display further emphasised the need, as she now recognised, of a considerable addition to their present dwelling.

Mary's anxiety to see about the packing was to tell the man to put the piano-stool in a box so that no one could tell what it was. The fact of the piano could not be hid, from the shape of the case, she knew; but she had no wish that all the world and his wife in the Hillswick district should know just yet that she was getting a piano stool as well as a piano. She could imagine Willa Twatt saying to her friend Clemie—

“Hes du heard da latest, Clemie?”

“No, lass; what is it noo?”

“Does du kno, does du raelly kno, at Jirry Laurenson hes gotten a piana—a bran-new piana?”

“Lass, du's doitin. What's Jirry Laurenson gaen ta du wi a piana?”

“I'm sayin da wirds o truth. Da piana cam wi da last steamer, addressed Mr Jeremiah Laurenson. Da men at took it ashore towld me.”

“It canna be fur Jirry. It most be fur da lass, Mary.”

“Jirry, or Betty, or Mary, I kno no; bit cam da piana did, an I'm tould she cost forty pound, no less. What tinks du o dat? An more as dat—a big box alang wi it—laekly a hat-box fur aa da fine hats shu's been buyin in Lerrick. Oh dat, dat! Da pride an stink ats ipun dat noo — noo at dir gotten a coarn o money.”

“Lass, dir nae grit pride ipu dem at I see. 'An dir no da first ats been a kind o wye upliftid wi money in dis world. Da box is mair laekly ta be

a piana-stule as a hat-box. Mary haes a aafil laekin fur music, du kens, laek her faider an midder, an da objec is laekly gaen ta try an laern da piana."

" Muckle laernin shu'll mak o it in Eshaness. Wha is ta laern her da piana? Na, my lamb at du is, its juist Mary's an Betty's pride, an nothin else, I assure dee. An dan, you know, whin onyeen comes ta caall, you know, ta caall, da midder 'ill say, ' Hev you heard wir Mary—na, it 'ill be our Mary, on the piano. It's juist lovely to hear her playin' ' Da Angel's 'Whisper.' It 'ill be nothin bit ' Angel's 'Whispers ' an ' Dreamland ' Waltzes, an ' Forget-Me-Not ' Polkas noo. Dir 'ill be no ' Sweet by an Byes ' noo. No, no. Accep maybe on a Sunday nicht whin Jirry comes hame fae da kirk. Oh, dat, dat."

" Lass, howld dee toŋgue. Dey say dis pianas canna play hymns; dats mair fur da organ, or dis harmoniums."

" Heth, dey'll be gettin baith da wan an da tidder, as weel. Wait ye you. An dan ye'll hear Betty, an Jirry, an Mary laabrin awey at dem, at wance, an maybe Joanie wi da fiddle. My wird, it 'ill be a boanie habitation if dat happens, da fower taerin awey at da sam time. An what 'ill com o da craetirs an da croft amung aa dis, I wid laek ta ken? "

" Lass, dunna be a fule. What I wid laek ta ken, though, mesell, is, whaar ir dey gaen ta pit aa dis? "

" My Clemie, dat's what I'm been winderin too. Da piana 'ill tak up most o da room o da ben end hersel, no ta mention da organ an harmonium.

Bit—bit—Clemi—e, does du 'know, more as aa dis—”

“ What ? ”

“ Dey tell me at Betty is boucht about a boat's lod o furnatir in Lerrick.”

“ Lass, du most be oot o dee senses.”

“ We'll see. Yon's what I'm towld. What is pride an ambition ! ”

Mary had a shrewd idea of what would be said and whispered in the neighbourhood as the evidences of her own and her mother's activities in Lerwick were made known in tangible shape ; and the hypothetical conversation narrated above was, she knew, nothing to what would be said in the parish as the various “ things ” began to arrive. She, however, had no wish to make matters worse by unduly exhibiting the articles to the public gaze. Hence her anxiety about the packing of the piano stool.

Having again reached the street, and sauntered northwards, Mary's gaze was arrested by an exhibit of pieces of music in a bookseller's window, among which was a well-known Piano Tutor.

“ Midder, I'll hae ta buy yon book. Dir nae use a haein a piana aless wan laerns ta play it. Yon's da book fur learnin fae. Come in an price it.”

During all this extensive purchasing that had been going on, Betty's heart had smitten her that she had entirely forgotten to buy anything for Joanie, the dear boy. This must be no longer neglected. To come home without anything for Joanie would be shameful and cruel, seeing that all the others of the household had been getting so much. The

question was, 'What should it be? The problem was solved as soon as she entered the shop, for hanging on the wall was the very thing she knew that Joanie ardently longed to possess—a fiddle.

After Mary had purchased the piano tutor, she asked if they had a piece called the "Angel's Whisper?"

"No, I'm sorry we don't have that piece just now, but we can easily order it for you. Here are several pieces, though, quite as good—in fact, some people say they are even better. Mendelssohn's *Capriccioso* in E major, 'The Village Blacksmith,' with variations, Bach's 48 Prelude and Fugues, and several songs. I'm told—I don't play myself—that there is nothing better going than Bach's 48 for proper technique — grand for teaching good fingering."

"I tink I'll tak da 'Village Blacksmith,' an dis twa songs," said Mary, who knew something of the song, and thought it might come in handy any night they had the blacksmith and his wife over to tea.

"You should certainly not omit the 48 pieces by Bach. Dirt cheap—only 2/6. You make a great mistake if you leave that."

"Weel, you can pit it in tu."

Mary having completed her purchases, Betty asked the price of the fiddle.

"That fiddle? A rare bargain. Copy of a Cremona. Only twenty-five shillings. Of course, if you want a really good fiddle, you will have to go to anything from six pounds up."

"I'm juist wantin a fiddle fur da boy."

“ Oh, this can do for a while. It’s a wonderful instrument at the price, I may tell you. Of course, it has to get strings, and a bow—and—”

“ Doesna twinty-five shillins pey fur everything? ”

“ Everything except a bow and good strings and—”

“ An what? ”

“ And a case. You don’t wish to have the fiddle broken for the want of a case, surely? ”

“ Mony is da fiddle I’m seen at’s laestid a lang time an hed nae case.”

“ Oh, you needn’t take the case unless you like. The instrument cannot be kept so well without it, that’s all.”

“ An what micht a case be? ”

“ We can give you a good case for ten and six, or a much better one at fifteen shillings.”

“ Fur siccan a place fur money as dis Lerrick is. It’s aafl.”

“ Oh, you can spend in Lerwick, no doubt; but see what you get for it.”

“ I dunna ken. We’re lived ithoot haein sae muckle aa wir lives.”

“ But then, see how much better you’ll live with more.”

“ You’ll put in da strings an da bow, shurly, ipun it.”

“ We couldn’t do that. We might put the strings as discount; but the bow! Why a good bow will cost as much as the case.”

“ Gude gaird me! Raelly, I don’t know what ta say. What prices du ye hae bows at? ”

“ From 4/6 up.”

“ Weel, pit in wan at six shillings dan. Hoo muckle is aa dat? ”

“ Let me see. Two, one, six. Now, I’ll put in this Tutor for a shilling more. But perhaps the boy does not need a tutor? He’s maybe beyond that stage.”

“ I tak he’ll need somethin o da kind. He’s juist beginnin, alto, I’m shure, da aald fiddlers hed nedder tutors or cases, an nobody ever kent whin dey began ta laern or hoo dey laearned.”

“ Well, that’s two pounds, two, and sixpence. I assure you you have got a splendid bargain. If the boy needs any violin music, you can just send to us.”

“ Thank you. Wid ye pit it up aa tagedder? ”

“ Certainly. Where shall we send the parcel? ”

“ Oh, Chromate Lane.”

“ All right.”

As Betty and Mary came out of the shop, Betty “ wae ” at the spending of so much money, Mary thinking more of the fact that she was the possessor of a real piano than of what it cost, they almost ran up against the Tittie and Madam, who were evidently making for the Grand Hotel.

“ Here you are,” said the former. “ We have caught you just at the right moment. You have been buying some music, I see, Mary? ”

“ Yae, we’re been buying; we’re been buying ower muckle. Dis is a aafil place, dis Lerrick. Ye canna move ithoot spending.”

“ Well, I suppose if one made up her mind,

you needn't spend anything at all ; but certainly the temptation is pretty strong. But I thought you came to the town for the purpose of spending. By the bye, did you secure the chiffonier ? ”

“ Yae, dat did we.”

“ Anything else ? ”

“ Yae. Mary boucht a piana.”

“ Oh,” said Madam, immediately interested, “ that’s splendid. A good one no doubt. We must try it after tea. Is it easily got at ? ”

“ Oh, yae, da place is no far awa.”

“ Tea,” said the Tittie. “ That’s the very thing I’m dying for. I assure you we need a very good cup of tea, and something with it, after the afternoon we’ve had with the dressmakers. What a job it is for a girl to get decently habited ; and what a trial it is to get things out of the dressmakers’ hands.”

“ Yae, its alwis been dat, whaarever ye go,” said Betty, “ even in Nortmavine.”

“ Hillo, you’re all here together,” said Mr H., who came up to the party carrying his golf clubs. “ Nothing happened, I hope ? You look rather serious.”

“ Nothing more serious than the usual old thing.”

“ What’s that ? ”

“ We’re all dying for a cup of tea.”

“ If that’s all, for goodness’ sake come and put some fresh life into you, then. We’ll all go together. Now, Mrs Laurensen, allow me to introduce you to the hotel. The others know the way ; they’ve been here before, you know.”

Rather reluctantly, and somewhat diffidently, Betty allowed herself to be ushered within the Grand Hotel, the size and rich furnishings of which she felt somewhat overpowering. As they entered, the Tittie ran lightly up the stair, to give the house-keeper word that the party were in the building and would make instant demands to have the wants of their inner man attended to.

At the same moment, the party at Hillswick were just in the act of sitting down to a similar refection.

“ I’m winderin,” said the P. M., “ hoo Mary got on wi da piana. Tink ye did shu manige ta bid da man doon da seeven pound? ”

CHAPTER XLVII.

Tea and Supper at the Grand Hotel.

AFTER those touches to their hair and attire which the tender sex regard as essential before sitting down to a meal, the whole party assembled at tea in the Commercial Room. Mary entered with the air of one who had been there before, and knew all about it. Her mother, who did not have the benefit of Mary's large experience, was less at her ease, but was careful not to give any outward signs of what she thought and felt. Mr H., the only gentleman present, was in very good form, and put himself to some trouble to set Betty at her ease.

"My labour in looking after you ladies has been very light, I must say," he remarked, after the meal had proceeded for a few minutes. "You all went off on your several ways, and left me severely alone. And what have you been doing, Mrs Laurensen, you and Mary?"

"Oh, we've been buyin twartree things," said Betty.

"I see. That's the one virtue your sex all possess in common. Give a woman some money and show her a shop, and she will not be long before she exchanges the cash for the goods."

"Maybe no," said Betty.

"What's the good of money," asked the

Tittie, "except to spend and make use of? You can't eat it. It's for no use at all unless you get something for it,—some satisfaction, something either to show, or wear, or look at. The spending of money is women's proper sphere; the making of it men's. Then see what excellent taste and sense women show in their spending. They don't waste their money in silly games, or puff it away in smoke, like men."

"Perhaps so; I don't know. But look at the pleasure we get out of the games and a smoke."

"And look at all the pretty things that women gather about them for the money they spend," put in Madam. "Why, two-thirds of the beauty, all the interest, and the most of what is best in art in the world, is due to women. Where would you poor men be but for us? Poor, drab, colourless creatures that you are. Why, it's the way that women spend that makes the world fit to live in."

"Oh, yes; we know all about that. You're been buying a few things, you say, Mrs Laurensen. What have the other two been doing, I wonder?"

"Dir been busy tu, wi things o dir ain."

"Oh, we have to be employed about many things that men can neither understand nor appreciate. They lack the faculty of interesting themselves in those hundred and one little affairs that mean so much to a woman," replied the Tittie.

"Getting gowns, perhaps. Wedding dresses, for instance. I have heard about certain dresses not being ready for to-morrow's function."

"Oh, you go along. No fear of the dresses.

We will be at the wedding all right, and the dresses too."

"An what made you o' da dressmakkers?" asked Betty.

"Oh, just as we expected. The dresses were not ready—a good bit off, in fact. But when the head dressmaker saw that we had come to town specially for them, she said she would make a great effort to have them ready to-night."

"To-night? What time?" asked Mr H.

"Not till half-past ten o'clock," she said.

"Dear wan," said Betty. "Dan we'll no get hom dis nicht."

"We will not. We are quite determined not to leave town until we have the gowns in our possession, so we cannot leave till to-morrow morning. But we can set out at eight o'clock and be in plenty of time for the wedding."

"Bit what 'ill da folk at haem say whin we dunna come. Dey'll tink dir somethin happened wiz."

"We will have to wire. We can send a wire immediately after tea, telling them they need not look for us till ten to-morrow morning."

"That will fit in splendidly. I can have a game of billiards after tea and then we can all go to the Pictures. You have never been at the Pictures, Mrs Laurenson."

"I, I! No I. Dey wir nae pictirs or onything o da kind in Lerrick whin I wis comin ta da toon. Da place is aa geen ower noo, wi wan thing an anidder."

"You will enjoy the Pictures all right, though,

I have no doubt. Well, I'll go along and wire now, if you like. What shall I say? Unavoidably detained. Will not be home till to-morrow morning? " Will that do? "

" That will do. Just go along and send the wire off, and when you come back we will all go down and see the piano that Mary has bought, and the other things that have been purchased."

* * * * *

Once again the same day the P. M. was sitting outside enjoying a pipe after a meal when a boy put a telegram into his hand.

" What is dis noo? What a baand dis folk is. Dey can nedder tak paece or gie paece. Wan everlastin tirry-mirry. Dey wid certainly need ta be a place some wye whaar a body could get rest fur da weary sowl, fur its not ipu dis eart. What's wrang wi dem noo, I winder? Maybe some o dem been mirakled."

Tearing up the envelope the P. M. read the telegram. " ' Unavoidably detained.' Juist so. We kno what dat means. ' Will not be home till to-morrow morning.' Juist so agen. Pits me in mind o a sang at da boys wis wint ta sing. Noo, I winder what dis pircisely means? Is it da lasses' frocks, or is Betty got her eye on mair furnatir, or is Mary no been able ta fix up da piana? Wan can never tell, wi dis weemen. Wance dir oot o your sight, ye never know what dey'll do. Weel, dir juist wan mercy aboot it. Dey will be a coarn o paece noo intil dey du com hom, be it moarnin or

efternune. Bit what's goin ta be done wi da bit o boy? Ye canna laeve da objec—"

"Another telegram, Mr Laurenson?" queried Mr E., who at this moment strolled round the corner, and saw the missive in the P. M.'s hands.

"Yiss, anidder telegram. Heth, dir spendin some money in telegrams, I can tell you; dats wan thing. I wis juist sayin dir no paece in dis world whaar dis weemen is. Non. Whin dir away dir non, an whin dir near you dir less—dat is, of coorse, if dey belang ta you."

"You should be pleased and proud that you have such women to take an interest in you."

"Oh, feth, dey tak a interest in me whin it suits dem; whin dir ony money wantid, dir not lang in lookin me up."

"You don't mean that, I know. Why, to have a daughter like Mary alone is enough to make any man proud."

"Oh, Mary is a fine ting o lass; not a bad ting o lass is Mary. Bit, do you know, shu's gettin very expensive as shu grous up. An what tink ye o da idder tree at's away, twa o dem mairied, an wan in a place ida sooth, no ta mention da idder twa boys—men noo?"

"I should say you should be a proud father, happy and delighted to give them anything within your power."

"I widna say bit noo an agen I du feel dat wye; bit its raelly a aafil piece o wark ta bring up a faimly in dis world."

"Perhaps it is; but seeing you have managed it so well, you should be well content. I wish I

could have been in your position. You have a stake in the world. I have none."

"Feth, I hae plenty o stakes. Da quiver is been keepid pretty fu aa da time. Bit I wis juist sayin aboot da boy—"

"Yes, you have never told me what this telegram was about."

"Weel, da telegram juist said at dey wirna comin hom till da moarn's moarnin; dat wis aa."

"Is that all? Are they well? That's the main point."

"Dir weel anof, sae far as I hear. I hear nae idder."

"They've likely been unavoidably delayed. Women can't go rushing about like men, you know."

"Dey dont, at ony rate. What I wis sayin whin ye cam, wis, at seein Betty an Mary wisna comin hom da nicht, it wid never du ta laeve da eemige o a boy i da hoose himsell aa nicht."

"Certainly not. That would never do. Suppose you and I take one of the motors and run over for him? He should be with us all night. Then he will be here to meet his mother when she arrives in the morning."

"Dat's no a bid idee. I never toucht o dat. I toucht I might juist geng ower an stay wi him mesell."

"No, no; we will go and fetch him."

And, ordering the motor, the two Commissioners went across to Eshaness for Joanie, who, delighted at the prospect of a run in the car, and more than delighted at the thought of sleeping in the

hotel, was inwardly glad that his mother and Mary had not turned up.

* * * * *

After the Tittie, the high-heeler, and Mr H., along with Betty and Mary, had been at the sale-room and duly admired the articles of furniture purchased; and after the merits of the piano had been set forth by Madam, who played several pieces from memory in fine style, the whole party adjourned to the Picture House.

Betty did not know what to think, either of the place, the performance, or herself. She could hardly believe that it was she, Mrs Jeremiah Laurenson, who was sitting in this large building, in the midst of a crowd of people—boys, girls, men and maidens, even old and young women,—all apparently interested in seeing a number of photographs moving on a screen. Her ideas of what was fitting and proper received a rude shock, as she saw men, lads, and boys smoking pipes and cigarettes, and heard conversation carried on in tones louder than whispers all around her. The peculiar nature of her feelings grew as she caught herself sometimes smiling, then laughing, then serious, always interested in the pictures before her. Here was she, a decent, God-fearing, sensible woman, the mother of a grown-up family, almost as much fascinated with a show as a child! The world was surely turning upside down, indeed. What would Lowra Maikomson, and other of her neighbours, say to the like of this? She who had,

unconsciously perhaps, but none the less truly, prided herself upon her douceness and her indifference to, if not contempt for, the vanities of this world—she to be sitting here, and actually enjoying the performance!

Amid it all, things about home would come in her mind. Had Joanie fed the calf? Had he flitted the kye at the proper time? Had his father had the sense to go over and see that all was well at home, or was he forgetting that the boy was all alone in the house? These thoughts were the flies in the ointment of Betty's enjoyment of the first view of the Pictures; but notwithstanding their presence, never at any time far away, she was if anything sorry when the last picture was thrown on the screen.

"That's over," said Mr H., lighting his seventh cigarette. "Now, I've arranged for a nice little supper at the hotel, so we'll all go down together and have a pleasant evening. Perhaps by the time the supper is over, the dresses will have come. Then we'll see something."

"See! Do you think we are going to let you, or any man, see them? "

"They are robbed of half their beauty, and all their glory, unless men see them."

"Phew! For you! I suppose you think we get frocks to please the dear lords of creation."

"What else do you get them for, I would like to know? What think you, Mrs Laurenson? "

"I dunna ken, I'm sure," answered that lady, who was a good deal amused at this little passage-at-arms. "I daarsay ye're no far wrang."

“ Well, let us go and have supper. We’ll all be able to agree about that part of the proceedings no doubt.”

The “ nice little supper ” had, at Mr H.’s special request, been most invitingly set out; and, to mark his appreciation of the honour conferred on him by being selected to accompany and look after the ladies, he had ordered some choice wines—light, but good and of the best vintage.

The supper proceeded merrily. Everyone was in good humour, and determined to have a pleasant evening. The young ladies were looking forward to the arrival of their frocks, and had pleasant anticipations of the coming wedding; Betty and Mary were both in a quietly happy frame of mind, the one thinking of the nice furniture she had bought, the other of the splendid piano; and Mr H., being young and healthy, in love with a pretty girl, in receipt of a good salary and not too much to do, was radiant. His sun was shining brilliantly. He was therefore in the frame of mind to be pleasant and agreeable to anyone; and seeing this was his own little function, he laid himself out to pay particular attention to Betty and Mary, endeavouring, and successfully, to put them at their ease. Each and all enjoyed the dainties provided, Betty wondering within herself if suppers like these were usual with the “ jantry.”

“ Now, ladies, you must have a little wine, just to mark this auspicious occasion. You can have Madeira, port, sherry, hock, or champagne. Which will you have, Mrs Laurenson?”

“ Oh, I couldna tak ony wine,” said Betty.

“ Nonsense. A little wine, we are told, is good, particularly after a light meal. You just try this delightful fizzy stuff—just an inch in the g'lass. It's very light, you know. Taste it. You've all got something? That's right. Very nice, isn't it? ” Mr H. asked, as Betty set down the glass after “ juist tastin ” the wine.

“ Now, I have a little toast to propose, although I know it's not usual to propose toasts in the presence of ladies. This, however, is an unusual occasion. My toast is—May the wedding dresses arrive in time; may they fit like gloves; may they be all that the ladies desire. To your feet, and—”

Just as the three girls had got up, and Betty was wondering whether she should rise or sit still, a loud knock was heard at the door, which Mr H. instantly answered. Immediately the girls heard the words, “ Parcels for Miss F. and Miss G., ” they almost dashed their glasses on the table and rushed to seize the parcels.

“ The dresses! ” exclaimed the Tittie and the high-heeler in one breath. “ They have come, ” said the latter. “ We must try them on before we leave town, you know. ”

“ Yes, please do, and let me have just a squint at them, ” said Mr H.

“ If you behave yourself, and are very good, we may let you have a peep at the frocks, with us in them, ” said the Tittie. “ Come away, Mrs Laurenson, and help us to get them on. ”

“ That's half-an-hour's job, I should say, ” said the poor male, left to himself. “ Well, there are means of consolation here, that's one thing. ”

In twenty-five minutes the quartette presented themselves, two robed in shining apparel.

"A sight for the gods," exclaimed Mr H., as he surveyed the two. "My word, you are swells. What does the Bible say? Something about the bride adorning herself for her husband? It would need Solomon, I imagine, to describe you, and do the dressmakers justice. What do you think, Mrs Laurenson?"

"I tink dir aafil boany."

"Now, you have had your peep, and I hope you fully appreciate the honour we have done you. We must get the dresses carefully repacked this night, for we start at eight to-morrow morning, you know," said Miss F.

This remark seemed to bring Betty back to a realization of the stern facts of life; for she looked with a glance of concern at Mary, and asked if "shu kent what time o nicht it wis." Mary could not, but Mr H. said it was some way about half-past eleven.

"Mercifil Fader! Bairns, dis is gudeless. Mary, go an get on dee things at wance. What wid dee faider say if he kent aa ats gon on dis day?"

Ten minutes later Betty and Mary were quietly shown out the front door of the Grand Hotel, Betty feeling anything but comfortable. Here was she, the pattern of her neighbourhood, stepping out of an hotel at twenty minutes to twelve o'clock, after indulging in wine—not much, but still—and that after having spent as much money on two pieces of furniture in one day as she had had many a year to keep the whole family on. The thought of both

actions was awful. What could she say to any of her friends when asked about ongoings like these?

These thoughts were not made any easier to bear as she caught sight of her landlady three steps off, peering anxiously from one side of the street to the other.

“ Oh, you’re livin,” she exclaimed, as she caught sight of Betty and Mary. “ Tank Gude fur dat. I tocht you an da bairn wis lost, or somethin hed come at you, at you hedna come hom, an I couldna rest. I hed ta come out an look fur you.”

CHAPTER XLVIII.

The whole party set out for the Wedding.

PUNCTUALLY at eight o'clock next morning Betty and Mary, accompanied by the landlady, and each carrying parcels, some of them of considerable size, arrived at the hotel, where the car was waiting.

"Here you are," said Mr H., who was standing in the door looking for them. "We are all ready. The boy is just bringing down the ladies' 'fixings,' as the American would say. I hope you are nothing the worse of your late sitting last night."

"We're naethin da waar; bit I dunna care fur yon kind o wark at aall," answered Betty.

"Good morning," said the Tittie, who along with Miss G. now appeared. "We are going to get a fine day both for the drive home and the wedding. 'Happy is the bride that the sun shines on.' By-the-bye, when does the wedding start? I forget."

"Wan o'clock."

"One o'clock! Goodness me! We'll not be ready in time. It will be past ten when we get home, and we couldn't dress in less than two hours. We'll be late, as sure as two is three."

"Two hours to dress! I'll guarantee to dress myself in a quarter of an hour," said Mr H.

“ You ! You men can’t speak about being dressed. You may be clothed, in a way ; but you are never dressed now-a-days. You simply throw a few things on you, stick on a hat or cap, and say you are ready. There is art, my dear sir, in a woman’s dressing. And art is long.”

“ It is ; very long sometimes, and it takes no note of time.”

“ Had you been living, now, in the time of the Cavaliers, when men did bedeck themselves, I’ll guarantee you men would have taken twice as long to get ready for a function as we.”

“ Perhaps so ; but the point is, while we are speaking, time is spending. We’ll better put a wiggle on, as the boys say, if we want to be at the wedding at all.”

After the five had got settled in the car, the rugs drawn about them, their motor veils adjusted, and all the impedimenta stowed somewhere and somehow, the car moved off, and was soon out of sight, the landlady having bade good-bye to Betty and Mary “ wi mony blissins ” and more for “ Jerry an da darlin boy.”

Nothing more serious than a punctured tyre, which delayed the motor half-an-hour, occurred on the road home, where they arrived about eleven o’clock.

“ Ye have come at da lang an da lent, hev you,” said the P. M., who, with the others, all carefully dressed, were standing about the hotel door. “ We thought ye wir never gaen ta turn up. What is keepid you ? ”

" Oh, a tyre burst, and we were late in starting, and—"

" Oh, yae, yae; da sam ould story. Never in time; never in time. Loard guide me, ir ye taen da whole o Lerrick wi you? What is aa dis at ye're broucht? "

" This? This is not a third, a fourth of what we've bought. But for goodness' sake don't talk of that just now. I wish you would ask Maggie to make us a cup of tea. We could drink it while we're dressing. 'We'll be late for the wedding.'"

" Dir nothin new in dat, my jewel. Sometimes da bride is late hersell. Bit we needna be in sic a tirry-mirry. Ye can pit on your things in half-a-oor, shurly. Bi-da-bye, did you get your frocks? "

" I should think we did."

" 'Wir dey ready? Hed dey da baesin-treeds oot o dem? "

" Go along. Go and see Maggie, and hurry her up. I hate being late."

" You'll no be late. Dir plenty o motors, an da place is no far aff."

" Come away, Mrs Laurenson, and Mary. Leave these men to gaze in the heavens and to blow smoke out of their mouths. It's about all that some of them do."

" Bit, my jewel at ye ir, you sood consider hoo weel we can du it," said the P. M., refilling and lighting his pipe. " So, shu's gon. As I'm said afore, da Loard go wi her. Shu's nedder fur hahdin or bindin da day, da Tittie. A wedding, you know, sets dis weemen in a stoor at's aafil. If its dir ain een, dir speechless; an if its some idder

body's een, dir no rest or paece wi dem at aal until da thing is don. Dir edder getting things da denk an penk demsells wi, or dan dir helpin idders dat wye; an buyin, an spekalatin, an winderin, an try-ing on, an pittin back, an gettin fittid, an never plaesed, no, no, no. An dan whin da day comes at lent dir never ready wi it aa. So, it amuses dem, an does wiz nae hairm, accep i da wye o da pocket. Joanie, is du no seen dee midder yet, boy?"

"No I. Is shu here?"

"Dat shu is, an da first whestin shu aksed wis whaar du wis. Go strecht up ta da door an staand aboot, so as ta lat her see dee, if it sood be oot o da window. Awey du goes."

In an hour and a-half the four ladies came downstairs, dressed, "aall in their best," for the wedding, ready to set out.

"Dere dey ir, heth. We'll hae ta geng in noo, an see if dey ir aatagedder ready, Da motors is aa here, an I see nothin ta pirvent wiz being in time."

The whole compay had now gathered in the Commercial Room—all the members of the Peat Commission, and Betty, Mary, and Joanie. Never had they looked so well; never had each and all been in better humour with themselves and the world. The men had taken pains to show, by some outward and visible sign, that this was no ordinary event that was on foot; the imp, who during the last few days had been in a quandary, having found it difficult to decide whether he was more in love with Mary than with his first fond

dream, the Tittie, kept himself in the background the better to steal glances at both; and the literary member, Mr E., showed his sense of the importance of the occasion by sporting a flaming red tie. And the ladies! The vision almost made the P. M. gasp.

"Heth, dir wan thing. Da dressmakkers is been lang aboot it, bit dir don da job, an don it weel. Ye aa look juist as if you'd come oot o a baand-box, an some o you ready ta flee. It's wonderfil what dress does, you know."

"Yes, but you give no credit to the people inside the drèsses. Look at the taste we've displayed in selecting the material and the style; and then look at ourselves."

"Dat is true in a wye, nae doot; bit aa da sam I wid juist laek ta see you dressed fur da voar rig, wi rivlins on, an a handkerchee aroound your heads, dellin. Dan ye wid see the differ. Dan you wid see what dress does. Noo, men, ye see—"

"Oh, for goodness sake stop praising the men and tell us all what we have to do. We haven't been at a country wedding before, and we need some instruction."

"That's a very sensible suggestion," said the Chairman. "I'm sure that none of us have the faintest idea of the proceedings, and we would need to be told as much about it as possible. And there is not much time, either, for the telling."

"Weel, da first thing I hae ta tell you is ye aa hae to geng ta da bride's hoose—"

"Oh, we know that," said Mr D.

"Yiss, bit ye don't know at ye're goin da

wrang wye. It's not uswil, I can tell you, fur folk ta geng ta a country bride's hoose in motors. Da richt wye is ta geng ipu your fit."

"Well, I suppose it's all the same as long as we get there."

"Its aa da sam; bit at da sam time its not aa da sam."

"How is that?"

"Its dis wye. Whin ye go ipun your fit, as ye sood do, dir wid laekly be men staandin ipu da rod a bít fae da hoose to meet you wi a coarn o refreshment."

"Refreshment at the beginning of the proceedings?"

"Certainly. Mony a wan comes a lang wye, an dey need a air o somethin."

"And what kind of refreshment do they get?"

"Oh, a air o screechan—da Auld Kirk, ye ken."

"The Auld Kirk?"

"Yiss, a drap o whisky. An of coorse maistly every wan taks it. An dan whin ye come inta da hoose, ye get anidder refreshment, fae da mairried folk, you see; an it wid be a aafil thing ta refuse dat."

"I'm sure, for my part," said the high-heeler, "I will not taste vile whisky. Can't they offer us tea?"

"Tae! Ye're aye efter tae. No; a drap o speerits is far haandier, I assure you."

"What do you think of all this, Mrs Laurenson?" asked the high heeler.

“ Oh, it wid never do ta refuse, whin ye get inside da hoose.”

“ Dan dir anidder thing I hae ta tell you. Every man haes ta kiss da bride as shune as shu’s mairied.”

“ Goodness gracious me!” exclaimed the Tittie. “ Poor thing! What an ordeal to go through!”

“ Heth, I tell you shu doesna tink shu’s poor. Far fae it. An dan anidder thing. Whin dir don wi a dance,—an of coorse dancing is da prīncipal wark, you know, an its keepid up aa nicht—da young chaps aa roars out—‘ Kiss da lasses,’ an maks a sprit efter dem.”

“ And do the lasses allow it,” asked Mr D., delightful visions floating before his mind’s eye.

“ I should tink dey du, an very gled o da shance, I assure you. An it most be a richt kind o a kiss, tu. Non o your touchin da lass on da broo-hair, or da side o her neck; bit a smack, a rael smack, ye knoo, at maks some soond. Faith, sometimes I’m heard da smacks going efter a dance laek shots oot o sodgers’ guns.”

“ Is it necessary to submit to the like of that,” asked the Tittie, while the imp determined there and then that if the opportunity came, and he could screw up courage to actually kiss one or other of his flames, even once, life could contain no greater bliss.

“ Its no a whestīn o submittin, my jewel; its a whestīn o—”

“ Anything else?” asked the Chairman, who seemed to be anxious to be off.

“ Weel, yiss, dir is somethin else; dir plenty else, but I dont hae time ta tell you it aa. Bit dir juist wan idder thing. Every man an woman at can is expeked ta sing a sang.”

“ Oh, dear-a-dear!” exclaimed Miss G. “ Is there a piano?”

“ A piana? No. Ye dont suppose at every crofter’s hoose haes a piana, du you.”

“ Well, then, I can’t sing.”

“ Oh, heth, ye can sing. What about yon braid at ye sang aboot at Huxter?”

“ That’s quite unsuitable for a wedding.”

“ I think we’ll better be moving,” said the Chairman. “ We’ll soon learn all the outs and ins of the proceedings, I have no doubt. When will we get back?”

“ Weel, if ye’re back afore eleeven or twal o’clock da moarn’s moarnin, ye can be very weel plaesed. Da wedding goes on aa nicht, ye ken.”

“ Shall we go now, then?”

“ Oh, dir juist wan idder thing I want per-teeklarly ta tell da leddies. Afore da company sets oot fur da kirk, ye ken, every wan o da lasses haes her pairtner—her man, ye kno—set aff til her. An what’s more, shu’s got ta stick til him; shu most keep a howld o him fur da rest o da time. Shu’s not ta go fleeterin aboot laek bees jimpin fae wan flooer till anidder, laek some o dis lasses noo-á-days. Shu’s ta hould on ticht til him, an keep her eye ipun him aa da time.”

“ Dear bless me! Do you mean to say that a girl has to be attached to one man the whole

time? Can she not have a dance with, and speak to another?" asked the Tittie.

"I widna go as far as dat. Bit ye're expekid, wance ye get da man, ould or young, ta tak a per-teeklar interest in him, so ta spaek, so at whin da pirceedins is ower, ye can haand him back safe an soond ta da mairied folk at gae him ta you. Fir men is precious, you know."

"Yes, they are, in their own estimation, certainly. And what if I get an old, weather-beaten fisherman of seventy-five, half blind and half deaf, who can neither dance nor walk?"

"Oh, we'll look etter dat some wye. I ken o a young chap at's fair gon ipu you efter hearin you singin i da kirk. Da warst aboot him is at he will be nearly as bad, fur he wid be speechless if he got you fur a pairtner. Bit he can baith dance an walk; he can ðu dat, I know."

"Well, I think we'll better walk to the motors now, and make a start," said Mr D. "If we stay here any longer, we'll meet the procession going to the church."

Acting on this advice, the sixteen settled themselves in the cars, the P. M.'s being in the van. Just as they were about to start, that individual looked round and exclaimed—

"Whaar's Meggie?"

"Maggie said she couldn't come. She had nothing to put on, she said, except what she wore at the last wedding she was at fifteen years ago," said his companion, the Tittie.

"Meggie is got ta come ta da weddin; dats wan thing I'll see aboot. Ta laeve a woman laek

Meggie, at can bake a brunie, an fry herrin, an cook a taatie, an mask tae ta perfection fae a weddin, fur want o a hat or a tippet! Loard bliss me! da thing is not ta be toucht o. Come ye awa wi me, my jewel. We'll shune fix Meggie up. I believe da objec is at her greetin een, seein wiz settin aff ithoot her. No, no; Meggie most come ta da weddin. Dir shurly plenty o things belangin ta you an da high-heeler at ye can fix Meggie up wi?" said Jerry, as the pair entered the hotel.

"Oh, there's plenty of things, but I don't know whether Maggie will appreciate being dressed in our garments."

"Mak ye nae doot about dat. Shu's sae aaber ta go, I hae nae doot, an sae disappointed at no gettin, at shu'll pit on onything."

"Hillo, Meggie, what's dis? What's dis? What's up wi dee at du's no comin ta da weddin?"

"My weddin days is ower," said Maggie, with a catch in her voice. "An forby, I hae nothin ta pit on."

"Pit on! Lass, howld dee tongue. I'm juist come back, I may tell dee, whin I saw du wisna wi wiz, wi Miss F. here, an shu's gaen ta fix dee up. So, up wi dee; up wi dee at wance, an get riggid oot, an dont keep wis waitin more as tree meenits. What it is ta look efter a baand o weemen!" Jerry added.

"Come away, Maggie, do. I have a lot of things that can easily suit you."

Maggie, not altogether willingly, but driven by her anxiety to be at the great event of the sea-

son, rose and followed the Tittie up stairs. In a few minutes they came back.

“ I tould you dat. Meggie, du’ll tak da shine oot o da baand yet. Woman, you’re lookin splendid. Yon hat is juist da very thing. Suits da complexion ta a T; an yon bloose an frock couldna be better. Faith, Meggie, I widna winder bit what du’ll fix a man yit. I ken o twa aald young chaps ats looking fur a sensible woman; an heth, I know dey couldna get better. We’ll dance at dy weddin yet, Meggie. Never doo mind. Come away, noo; da folk is waitin.”

The folk were waiting rather impatiently; but they were all glad to see the Tittie and the P. M. coming with Maggie between them dressed in a style which everyone said reflected the greatest credit on the Tittie’s good taste.

“ Noo, here we ir, an aff we go. Come on, Meggie; come up wi wiz. Hear ye da shots? Dir at it; dir beginnin. Da boys is practeesin fur da pircession. Noo, Jaekie, giv her sheet, bit keep dee eye open fur ony men staandin aboot whin we’re comin near da hoose, an slow doon. Slow doon. Noo, boys, dis is fine. We’re on da move at lent.”

CHAPTER XLIX.

The Bridal Procession on the road to Church.

A short drive brought the motors within sight of the bride's house; but although the P. M. kept a sharp look-out, he saw no one standing about ready to offer travel-stained travellers a suitable and needed refreshment. "Dat's wan good ould fashion goin oot, alang wi some o da rest," he remarked to himself. He and those in the motors, however, saw a large number of people of all ages and of both sexes coming from every direction to the house.

"Weel, dir wan thing. Dir plenty o folk goin ta da weddin. Dey'll be some fun dis day an nicht, I assure you."

"And who is the happy couple?" asked the Tittie.

"Oh, he's a fine young chap, da second son o wan o my aald freends, Ertly Wishart, an his name is Ertly tu. He's been away sooth sailin fur seeven year; an laek a sensible lad, he didna come rinnin haem every winter, but stack in; an heth, do you know, he's been sailin second mate fur twa year. An of coorse he's laid by a bit o money, an noo he's goin ta hev a first-rate, ould-fashioned country weddin, laek a sensible man."

"But how," enquired Mr D., who overheard

this conversation, "how can he or any other man have a real, proper country wedding in these times of war, when liquor is not to be had, and many things are scarce."

"Bliss my sowl an boady, du you think at a man at's gaen ta mairy an hae a country weddin, is no pervided fur da laek o dat? Nae faer, Erty is no a fule. Dir nae doot at he's laid by fur a gude while noo everything at he saw a year or twa ago nicht rin short—everything at could keep, you know, laek whisky. Ithoot plenty o whisky a country weddin is not wirt goin til. Don't you mak ony doot about dat. Erty Wishart is no his faider's son if he'd aksed folk til his weddin ithoot makin plenty o pervision fur dem, an perteeklarly plenty o whisky."

"And what quantity would you say was plenty of whisky?"

"Weel, I wid say a fair an raesonable whantity wis twinty-five gallons."

"Twenty-five gallons! You mean bottles."

"I mean nothin o da kind. I mean exakly what I say. Twinty-five bottles! Dat! Dat wid be nae mair as wid weet dir mooths. Na, na. Whin ye go til a country weddin ye expec ta get somethin, an ye get it too, I assure you."

"It appears to me," said the Tittie, "that you men go to country weddings to imbibe as much liquor as you can hold. You must be all tipsy before the thing is over."

"Nothin o da kind, my jewel. I'm seen a anterin een noo an agen a bit aff; bit ye see dat at more things as weddins. No, no. What dey

du is, whin dey tak a drap dey dance it aff, an dan dir ready fur more. An da thing goes on aa nicht. What dey pit in comes oot in sweat; an heth, I'm seen efter a tree days' weddin every man as sober as a judge an no a drap o liquor left oot a therty gallons."

"Well, I think you men are the most stupid animals on the face of the earth, to go on like that. I can see no enjoyment in it."

"Nae doot; bit ye see men an women wis built different. Men most hae a coarn o fun noo an dan, fur its no muckle dey get in dis pilgramage, wi wan thing an anidder. Feth, here we ir, near da hoose. Noo, dir wan thing ye most aa do. Ye mann taste, at ony rate, da gless o whisky at da folk 'ill haand ta you whin you get inside. Ye're not ta shame da folk bi refusin. Mind dat."

"Before we go in, though," continued the Tittie, "I wish to know who the bride is."

"Oh, da bride. Shu's a fine ting o lass, a douchter o Betty Edminson's—I mean Mrs Renelson. Her faider is dead. Da lass an Erty, ye know, took a notion o een anidder afore dey left da schule, an laek a sensible woman shu stuck ta him, an he laek a wise man stuck ta her. Dir a pair o dis kind, ye see, at folk says is juist made fur een anidder, an dey seem ta tink da sam, fur aa da time da boy is been away, Jessie—dats her name, ye ken—never lookid at anidder man, an juist guid on perparin fur da weddin. Heth, dey say shu haes a gude boddam til her kist. A careful, hard-wirkin lass is Jessie."

"Quite a romance, I should say."

"I don know. We'll speak about dat therty year efter dis. Dey'll hae some experience o da romance dan, nae doot. Noo, here we ir. Lat me get oot an lat you doon."

"Hillo, Ertý Maikomson, is dis dee?" asked the P. M. of his old friend.

"It's aa its fur me. I'm mairied man, du knos, an Lowra is helpin da bride's midder."

"I see, I see. Weel, dey couldna hae better. Da bit o a lass haes nae faider, an a man most be at da head, of coorse."

"Tinks doo, Jirry," whispered Ertý, "will dis folk tak a hame-comin drap o whisky? Can I offer it ta dem?"

"I should say sae. Du's ta offer it ta every wan, an see at dey tak it, tu. Dats wir custom, an' dey'll juist hae ta faa in wi it."

"Lowra tinks we'd better offer dem a coarn o wine, maybe."

"Wine! Wine is only fur cristins, an dir no come dat lent yet. No, no. Gie dem some-thin daacent ta begin wi."

By this time the party had entered the house and had with due ceremony, at which Lowra officiously assisted, been ushered into the best room, which was none too large, but which with a good deal of squeezing accommodated them all. After helping the ladies to take their things off, and having found places for the gentlemen's hats somewhere, Lowra introduced the bride's mother to the chairman who, fully entering into the spirit of the adventure, was graciousness itself, and put the three married folk entirely at their ease. The others

were in the same mood of friendliness and good-fellowship, and soon a laughing, cheery crowd were joking each other over the glasses they held in their hands. Betty was of course claimed by Lowra as her own particular and dear friend; and neither Joanie nor Mary were forgotten in the all-embracing way in which she took possession of the party. In fact, one would have thought that the wedding was that of her daughter, and not of Mrs Renelson's, for that individual, not having met any of the Commission before, and being naturally shy and diffident among strangers, felt somewhat ill at ease. She busied herself, however, in supplying what was needed for their refreshment, and was very glad to see them making themselves so much at home.

After just "lippin" the liquor, and making very wry faces at the taste thereof, the ladies of the party, led by Betty, left the room and mingled with the guests in the other apartment, to which the gentlemen soon followed. The but-end was rather congested. Although everything that could by any possibility provide seating accommodation had been requisitioned, even to the kirn, on which was perched a boy of 10, there was not room for all, and some were standing.

"I thought there were two hundred guests," said the Chairman to Jerry. "There's not more than forty here."

"Ah, bit dir aa scattered ower da place, you know. Dir some i da barn, an dan dir some i da next hoose, an da next house ta dat, an da next

ta dat agen, maybe. Dey aye mak room fur dem some wye."

"But it must be rather uncomfortable, I should think. They cannot all sit down together, or dance in one place."

"Dats true. Bit dir na perteeclar hairm in dat. Ye can tak your tae or your supper in wan place juist as weel as anidder; an dan, forby, da lads an da lasses hae mair shance o a air o coortin in da different houses. Dir no sae mony aboot, ye see. An fur da dancin, dey juist tak time aboot i' da barn."

"I see. What are we to do now?"

"Oh, we're ta geng oot an get paired aff fur da percession, ta go ta da kirk."

The scattered guests having been gathered together on the green and duly marshalled, the procession started, every lass having a lad, old or young, to the strains of two fiddles, in the manipulation of which the fiddlers spared no "elbow grease." As soon as a move was made, shots were fired, fowling-pieces or any other kind of gun that could be had being used. The usual charge was as much powder as filled a clay cutty pipe; but it was sufficient to make a noise, and proclaim the fact that a wedding was on foot; and that was all that was wanted.

The firing went on at intervals during the whole progress of the procession, the order of which was—First and foremost, the married or "honest" pair, which place of honour out of compliment was given to the chairman, who claimed Betty as his partner; then came the bride and bestman, the

best maid and bridegroom, the rest following anyhow. The distance to church was considerable, but this only enhanced the fun and enjoyment of the adventure, for the day was fine, and all Nature seemed to smile on the participants, who, all told, numbered nearly two hundred. In accordance with ancient custom, the course of the sun was strictly followed; they "hed ta go wi da sun, you know," said Jerry. This added a mile or so to the peregrination; but that was nothing to the guests at a country wedding. The Chairman, with Betty on his arm, lead the van, his pleasant face beaming with enjoyment; after the bridal party came the P. M., to whom clung Lowra Maikomson, both evidently in their element; the vice-chairman, with Clemie Twatt, seemed to think that life was still worth living; and Ertty, his homely honest face lit up with his own peculiar smile, gave the impression that he was saying to himself if he could but have his present partner always beside him—Lowra it being assumed, having by a merciful and gracious Providence, been gathered to her fathers—there might still remain some possibilities of a quiet evening to a somewhat stormy pilgrimage. The other married folk appeared all well content, and stepped along with a gleam in their eye and a kick in their step that recalled younger days.

The bride was dressed as brides usually are,—in white, but wore a hat and cloak on the journey to church, her precious veil and flowers being carefully stowed away in a band-box of large dimensions and carried by an honoured page. She was quietly but radiantly happy. The bridegroom, a

tall, well-set-up young fellow, with dark hair, bronzed face, and the air and gesture of one who had seen and known something of the world although he was only twenty-eight, stepped along with firm, easy gait; and the best-man emulated the style and bearing of the hero of the hour to the best of his ability. Towards the end of the procession were seen the Tittie, holding firmly on to the arm of the literary member, Mr E.; then came the high-heeler, to whom had been apportioned a respectable merchant of doubtful age who had been a celibate all his life, but who seemed to have taken a violent fancy to Madam, judging from the solicitude with which he attended her and the glances he would every now and then steal at her face; then Mary, "fixed" to a boy of 13; and Joanie, under the guardianship of a female who could have been his mother. "The tail sweep," namely an old young man who had secured no partner, rounded off the procession. The sweep consisted of a broom made of straw, to which was attached a long rope, with which the live "sweep" dragged it behind him.

Cheerily, with joy in their hearts and smiles on their faces, the company moved on, to the accompaniment of the fiddles, the reports of the guns and an occasional cheer raised by passers-by. These individuals were not allowed to go on their way without receiving a tangible, or at any rate a liquid token of the respect in which they were held by the wedding guests. Fore-runners were on the outlook for such persons; and as soon as they came within hail, the procession halted while a "cup

o kindness " was handed to Lowrie or Meggie, as the case might be, to drink the happy pair's health.

" Here du is, Lowrie, mi boy. Tak her up," —which Lowrie generally did with a smack, and sometimes got a " peerie coarn " more; while in the case of Meggie, the adjuration was that if " shu left wan drap, or wan sypin," the party who offered her it " wid feenish her." Meggie strove manfully to fulfil the behest, but after making a valiant effort generally returned the glass half empty, saying, " Hae, boy; I canna drink it aa. Tak it up deesell." To which the customary reply was, " Toots, woman. It's no every day at Marta mairies. Try her again." Thus admonished, Meggie managed another thimbleful. " Not anidder drap if du sood never move oot o da spot du's staandin in. Feenish da gless, boy; an move on. Oh, blissins, blissins, on da boanie pair, an on ye aa."

The company having seen that Meggie had taken a refreshment, moved on with a cheer, to which she endeavoured to reply, standing watching the crowd with a tear in her eye and a lump in her throat as she recalled days when she too was young, had been at many a wedding, and had nearly been a bride herself. These interesting interruptions to the progress of the procession were rather frequent; but at length the church was reached and entered. The bride, best maid, and two lady friends went to the vestry, where the very important duty of getting the bride properly and completely habited was performed. This was an operation which naturally took some time, and the

company settled themselves in the pews to wait patiently for her reappearance. The bridegroom, with his stalwart best man, occupied a seat before the choir. During the time of waiting some low-toned conversation went on. Clemie Twatt, being the vice-chairman's partner, and he being a "mere man," found it impossible to give expression to her feelings as she would have wished; but Lowra Biglin, having beside her her bosom friend, Liza Shewardson, was not so tongue-tied.

There is a hymn which contains the words—

"The bride eyes not her garments,
But her dear bridegroom's face."

In the case of the majority of the company, they were eyeing the large bride's cake which stood on a table in the choir.

"Dir wan thing at Jessie Renelson is gotten fur waiting twal year fur a man, at ony rate," said Lowra.

"What's dat?"

"Shu's gotten a cake yunder da size o a forty-shillin pot."

"Weel, lass, what better does du want? Du's no wantin a tippny curran-loaf, is du?"

"No, I'm not; bit I tink less micht sair her."

"Weel, I don know. I daarsay afore every een o dis baand gets a bit, dey'll no be muckle left, big as shu is."

"An what wis da need o her aksin sic a crood til her weddin?"

"Need? Dey wir nae great need. Bit Ertty wantid a rael country weddin, wi aa da nee-

bourhood at it, an I don't see why he soodna hae it, seein he haes ta pey fur it."

"Heth, I know a boanie penny shu'll cost him, afore aa is ower. An dan da dress ats on her. Wi silk stockings, I'm heard, an saeten buits. An da dress made in Aberdeen, you know."

"Aberdeen! Na, my Lowra, du's oot o it aatagedder. I ken fur a fak at Erty broucht da dress haem wi him fae London. Jessie guid wance a vaige ta Lerrick ta get mizered, and sent it on ta him whin he cam aff o his last voyage. Erty wisna gaen to tak ony o your tippence-happny stuff, or makkin edder, I assure dee."

"An dey say da dress is made o da very best. Heavy saetin, wi a veil laek a boat's sail, an aa kind o flooers at wan can mention, an I know no what else. I know, as I say, da weddin, wi wan thing an anidder, 'ill staand him a boany penny. Set him better ta lay da most o it by."

"Lass, howld dee tongue. Why soodna Erty, or ony idder richt lad, hae a rael weddin if he wants it, an can pey fur it. A man doesna mairiy every year."

"Dat's true, alto some o dem mairies mair as wance, or twice edderin. Bit I still tink at less could a saired da laek o Jessie Renelson. Dey'll be a upliftin ipun her efter dis. Dey'll laekly hae it i da papers yet, I widna winder. Heth, I mind whin her midder mairied, dey hedna sae muckle. Twa bottles o whisky an fower shillin curran lofs, an a seeven-an-sixpenny cake, wis aa, accept a coarn o tae an fardin biscuits, an wan owld ram an twa geese. Dat wis aa at her faider could gadder ta-

gedder. Bit heth, we hed a braw weddin, little as it wis. Noo-a-days, its nothin bit your ten-pound cakes, an boiled ham, an tongue, an port wine, an——

“Lass, wheest wi dee. Here shu comes.”

CHAPTER L.

Wedding Festivities.

As the bride entered the church, leaning on the arm of Ertý Maikomson, who gave her away, a wedding hymn, in which all present heartily joined, was sung, and the ceremony was proceeded with. The bride, like all brides, "looked charming" in her bridal attire; the bridegroom, like most bridegrooms, had a look in his eye and an attitude in his bearing which proclaimed the fact that in his opinion he had won this jewel and was determined to take possession of it. The ceremony, impressive in its simplicity, was one which those present did not readily forget. The brilliant sunshine, streaming through the windows of the church, threw its gleams on the bridal party with an effulgence that made the heart glad; and which in the opinion of many of those who witnessed it, augured for the happy couple many prosperous days; the clear tones of the minister's voice as, with fitting solemnity he impressed upon each the duties laid upon them in the vows they were taking; the firm and decided responses of the bridegroom and bride; the fervent prayer, and the heart-felt singing—all made up a scene which while lacking the impressiveness of the cloistered cathedral with its dim religious light, the deep-toned

organ, and "the full-voiced choir," had a beauty all its own.

The ceremony over, the bride, going up to the choir, stuck a knife in the bride's cake, and returning to her place, was, along with the bridegroom, the subject of many and hearty congratulations. Ertly was not slow in showing his feelings, for although he was aware that Lowra was looking on, he gave the bride a kiss that resounded through the church.

"Faith, I tink I'll go and du da sam," said Jerry; and suiting the action to the word he went up and congratulated the newly-wedded pair in his own hearty way.

"Heth, here dey come. I towld aa dis Commission folk—da men, ye ken—at dey hed ta kiss da bride, every wan; so du'll hae a very guid sample o aa da different kinds an wyes o it."

"Mercifil wan, I canna sit here an be kissed bi aa dis uncan folk. I'm no gaen ta du it. Lat wis geng inta da vestry at wance," said the bride.

"Oh, weel, its aa da sam whedder da thing is don i da vestry or i da kirk, as lang as it is don."

Meantime, a quiet buzz of excitement was going on, for the stewards were busy uncorking bottles and pouring out wine for the guests, who, refreshed with the elixir and a piece of bride's cake, were enjoying the wedding more than ever, and now felt themselves free to let their tongues wag to some extent.

"Weel, Jessie is hed a boany weddin sae far," said Liza Shewardson.

"Yae," answered her friend Clemie; "nc

sae bad. Ower muckle singin, I tink."

"Ower muckle singin! Lass, du's no wise. Dats da wye at aa da weddins is don noo-a-days i da kirk."

"I dunna ken. Dey wir nae singin at her midder's een, at ony rate, an shu wis i da kirk tu. Dis a braa coarn o wine, I most say."

"Yiss, an da cake is juist lovely. I'll hae ta keep a gude bit ta sleep ipun."

"I waarn, my Liza, at dy draemin days is ower, laek mi nown."

"Ower or no ower, I'm gaen ta hae it inunder mi pillow, whidder I draem or no. Wan never knows what a day or a oor may bring fort."

"Dat is true," said Clemie, who at that moment caught sight of Robbie Yunson, who once, she imagined, had a notion of her, and had not yet "settled down."

Congratulations having been showered upon bride and bridegroom by one and all, and they being ready to depart, a movement was made to reform the procession and march back to the bride's house, to begin the wedding festivities in earnest.

Outside the church, waiting for what they knew was coming, was a crowd of boys and youths who for various reasons had not been invited to the wedding. Like the eagle which scents his prey afar off, boys from distant parts had congregated near the church knowing that the bridegroom was a man of means, a good fellow with a warm heart, and knowing what boys liked, he would live up to the highest traditions of the district so far as they were concerned. They were not disappointed.

As the bridal party emerged from the vestry, and before the procession was formed, the bridegroom, who was on the lookout for the boys, threw them a splendid new football, and along with it a handful of silver coin. The scramble for the latter was worth seeing. With a swoop the boys made for their prey, tumbling over each other, on the top of each other, one hauling this way, the other pulling that way; one who was pinned down by two others even getting hold of a shilling between his teeth. At last every coin had found a possessor; and flushed and breathless, the youths gathered together to examine, admire, and kick the ball, which they did for hours afterwards, until they were dead tired.

The only change in the order of the procession was that the bridegroom now had the bride in his own possession; the others went back as they had come, Lowra and the Chairman leading the way. A jovial and happy party they were; and again almost everyone who was met on the road had to take "juist a drap" to drink the newly-wedded pair's health. Shots were again fired at intervals as the procession wended its way along, everyone laughing, talking, and looking forward with pleasureable anticipations to the festivities in which they were to be soon engaged.

Arrived at the bride's house, where Mrs Renelson and assistants were waiting to receive them, the party were welcomed in true and hearty Shetland fashion by the bride's mother, Mrs Renelson, who was anxious to see that everything should be right. A drop of "hard" was duly offered to the guests

as they reached the dwelling, of which most of them partook, some more and some less, some none at all. Tea was of course set out and ready for everyone, and as soon as all had been seated—a matter of some difficulty, for one house could not contain the whole party—tongues began to wag, and conversation, intermingled with joyous laughter, reigned. After tea, which did not last long, for the young people were eager for the dance, the tables and other impedimenta soon disappeared by the simple expedient of hoisting and reeving what was of no use as seating accommodation to the roof, and the rest in the “lamrie.” The barn was soon chock-a-block with dancers, as well as two other ben ends, those who were not dancing occupying themselves as best they could until they got a chance. The simultaneous use of three apartments necessitated the employment of three fiddlers; but they were there, “lashing at it” as hard as they were able. Dancing was in full progress in no time; and passers-by could hear, mingled with the loud “hoochs,” the strains at one and the same time of “The Deil Amung da Tailors,” “The Sodger’s Joy,” and “Lady Mary Ramsay,” as a start off.

“Noo, Betty,” said Jerry, when the second dance was about to start, “I winder if du can shak dee muslins yet. I’m seen da day whin du could link her aff wi da best o dem. Come awa,” and seizing Betty by the arm, he “luggid” her out to the floor, having laid off his coat before starting. “Here’s da Chairman wi da bride, an da Tittie wi Lowrie Simpson. Dats wan set, wi wiz.

Heth, dere's Robbie Ruslan taen up da high-heeler i da idder set. Noo, bairns, set fae you. Joanie, boy, gie wiz edder Ahint da Daeks o Voe, or Aff shu goes to Mirimachee. Gie wiz somethin Shetlan. Dat's it, noo; dats it. Dere shu goes. Reel, Betty, reel; shak deesell up. Du's doin no sae bad; bit heth, Lowra Maikomson is no far ahint, wi da vice-chairman. Ertly is gotten a young lass, an he's setting fae him laek wan o'clock. Hooch, folk; why dont you hooch? What's a Shetlan reel ithoot a hooch?"

Ang giving a "hooch" which made the rafters ring, to which Ertly responded almost as vigorously, the P. M. called for the fifth time "Reel O," at the same time seizing Betty by the shoulders and pushing her before him.

"Betty, du's not up ta what I'm seen dee. Du canna turn aroond sae whick, I see, as du wis wint. Fur meself, I'm nearly as supple as whin I wis twinty," he said, as he stuck his knuckles into his sides and with great agility danced in the hornpipe style.

"I say," said the Chairman, whose face was already streaming with perspiration, "this is sheer hard work. I am about done already."

"Don already! Don't say dat, fur goodness sake. We're no weel begun. Dis goes on aa nicht, till brakwist time da moarn."

"Jirry, I can dance no more," said Betty in a pleading tone, as she saw that her vigorous partner was again going to call "Reel O."

"Weel, my Betty at du is, du'll better tak a rest, dan, an get ready fur anidder shak up efter.

Dir plenty o time. Da fiddler, I see, is needin a rest tu, so we'll lat da neist set geng up. Ye can sit by an watch dem, an I can hae a smok ootside."

"Oh, Jirry, Jirry, whin will du laern ta tak care o dysell? Gaen ootside an dee in a loch o sweat. Du'll get da broonchaidies again afore du's don wi dis ploy. I kno dat."

"Broonchaidies! Woman, wha is tinkin o broonchaidies wi a fine simmer nicht? Nae faer o Jeremiah. I'll pit on mi jacket, though, juist ta plaese dee."

The Chairman, the Tittie, the high-heeler, and the vice-Chairman all felt with Betty that they had had enough for a beginning, at any rate, and were thankful to her that the reel had been brought to a close for the nonce. What they felt more, however, was the want of a place where they could retire and cool down in comfort, without risk of catching cold. There was no withdrawing room, or conservatory, or smoking room, where they could rest in peace and comfort. In this emergency they sought the butt end, where dancing was not going on; and here they found Meggie up to the eyes in pots and pans, and dishes and eatables. The P. M., who had accompanied the four to the room, was not long in spying her among others similarly engaged.

"Loard bliss me, Meggie, is du here?"

"Dat am I."

"Weel, an does du tink at I took dee ta da weddin ta staand an cook an wash dishes aa nicht? Does du no hae anof o dat whaar du is? An does

du tink at dis is da wye ta get a man? Why is du no ben dancin?"

"Oh, I'm gaen ta d'ance efter supper time."

"Supper time! Du's gaen ta staand here an elt an vaarg amung a'a dis cooking till supper time! Woman, du'll not be able ta lift a fit."

"Dat'll I."

"No, no; dis 'ill never du at aal. Whin du cam ta da weddin, du cam as wan bidden, no as a servant. Noo, I'll tell dee what it is. I'm gaen oot ta hae a smok at da back o da byre, an I'll be back in half a oor. Up fur a dance du comes wi me dan, or I'll see da raeson why. Noo, mind what I'm sayin, an get deesell ready. An gie up dis pots and pans at wance. Mind, I'm tellin dee." And with that the P. M. departed.

Dancing went vigorously and cheerily on during the next few hours, the heated guests being refreshed by abundance of hot tea and biscuits handed round from a large tin, "juist as shu cam fae da shop." Meggie and Jerry were up more than once, for the latter, after the first dance said she must have one with him, and made arrangements with others that Meggie was not to be neglected. Meggie was enjoying herself to the full. She could dance with grace and vigour, and as the P. M. said, could "shaw loks o dis younger lasses da richt wye ta shak a muslin."

All the members of the Peat Commission entered into the spirit and fun of the proceedings with the zest of youth. Everything was novel, therefore interesting; and making themselves at home and agreeable to everyone, they enjoyed the

fun as much as those to the manner born. Even the high-heeler relaxed and unbent; and although both she and the Tittie felt the heat uncomfortable and the dancing heavy, they took care not to show their feelings. The imp was in the seventh heaven, for he had danced with both of his adoreds, and was still in a state of doubt as to whom he would ultimately bestow his affections. Joanie was quietly and unostensibly happy. There was plenty of currant loaf, biscuits, sweeties, and lemonade to be had, and he spent most of his time visiting first one dancing-room and then the other, along with four boon companions who had much the same views on life as he himself possessed.

After tea at eight o'clock, to which all sat down, pleased but tired and ready for a rest, conversation, flirting, and a little further dancing followed, and the great event of the evening, namely, supper, was announced. The tables had been brought back, again, and very soon groaned under the weight of the good things provided. Roast mutton, roast geese, cold ham, plum pudding, currant dumpling, bread, biscuits, cheese, butter, jellies, and a dozen things besides, were there in abundance.

"Noo, folk," said the "mairried man," Ertty, "come an sit in, an pît somethin i your mooth. Ye need it, wi aa dis wark."

"Yiss, yiss, come awa, come awa wi my blissins," said Mrs Renelson. "Its aa ready, every wye, baid here an ta dem at's i da barn an da idder hoose."

"Weel, I must say," said Jerry, who took in Lowra, the Chairman having given his arm to

Betty, "at dir nae want here, tank Gude. Whaever is don it is don it weel, dats sure. Plenty baith ta aet an drink."

A few minutes after the guests had sat down, the Chairman rose. He had, he said, a most pleasant duty to perform, namely, to propose the health of the bride and bridegroom. This, he need hardly say, was the first Shetland country wedding he had ever been at, but he devoutly hoped it would not be the last. (Applause). He would appeal strongly to those in their midst who had thoughts of committing matrimony to lose no time, for he could assure the company that he and those associated with him in the Peat Commission had enjoyed this day to the full, and would, he had no doubt whatever, enjoy what remained of the proceedings even more. (Hear, hear). In asking the company to drink to the health of the newly-wedded pair, he wished to say that in the brief intercourse he had had with them, he had formed a high opinion of both the one and the other. Both were quiet and unassuming, and he could easily see, capable and sensible. They held the respect of the whole neighbourhood, who along with himself, wished them the utmost happiness and prosperity in their wedded life. "Lang may their lum reek," he concluded.

The toast was received and drunk with the greatest heartiness. After the bridegroom in a few words had replied, he added that now they were at supper, it was customary to have a few songs as well as a few speeches. He hoped that this old custom would be observed, for he wanted

the wedding to be everything it should be. "Who will give us a song?" he asked.

"Weel, I know non at can du it better as Ertly Maikomson. He haes some fine ould sangs," said the P. M.

"Me? Me? Jerry. Boy, du's no wise."

"I'm wise anof. Nae faer o me. Come on, Ertly, noo, an give wiz da 'Brave Boys.' Non can du it better. What tinks du, Lowra?"

"Oh, Ertly wis wint ta sing dat sang weel anof."

"Dere du hears, noo, Ertly. Dere's da wife o dee bosom says du can sing it, an sing it du most."

Ertly, who was rather pleased at being asked to sing first, and who was just nicely mellowed, got up, and after clearing his throat, proceeded to sing the famous "Brave Boys" in a voice which was not at all bad, even though it had seen full sixty winters. Grasping both lapels of his jacket, and looking straight before him, Ertly delivered himself as follows:—

How long are you going to stop on shore,

Your money all spent and gone?

A voyage to Greenland we will go

And in summer back again,

Brave boys;

And in summer back again.

'Twas eighteen hundred and thirty-nine,

On March the twentieth day,

We hoisted our flag to the mainmast head

And for Greenland bore away.

Brave boys, etc.

And now we are at Greenland, boys,
Our gallant ship for to moor;
But we would wish ourselves back again
To the bonnie lasses on shore.
Brave boys, etc.

The Captain he went to the foremast head
With a spyglass in his hand;
“A whale, a whale, a whalefish, my boys,
And she blows at every span.”
Brave boys, etc.

Our bos’n was walking the quarter-deck:
A brave little man was he;
“Overhaul, overhaul, let yon davit-tackles fall
And launch your boats to sea.”
Brave boys, etc.

The boat being launched and the line payed out
She made a great fury with her tail;
The boat was capsized; four men were lost,
And a nice little ’prentice boy.
Brave boys, etc.

Sad news, sad news, to our captain came,
It grieved his heart full sore;
The losing of the ’prentice boy,
But the fish grieved him ten times more.
Brave boys, etc.

’Tis time to leave this cold country now,
And for England bear away;
The frost and snow, where the whalefish doth
blow,
Where the daylight is always seen.
Brave boys, etc.

The chorus, which consisted of the words “Brave

Boys ” and the last line of each verse, was given with a tone and a “ turn,” which appealed strongly to the other “ brave boys ” present, who, taking a “ tasting ” at every other verse, gradually got excited, and at the close vociferously applauded the singer.

“ I tould you dat. Erty is da boy fur dem wi da ould sangs,” said the P. M.

“ And what are you going to sing yourself?” asked the Tittie.

“ Me? Oh, I don know. I’ll juist see. Bit ye hae ta sing tu, mind.”

“ Noo, I tink,” said the P. M., “ seeing at Erty haes dun sae weel, an latten da folk see hoo a ould sailor’s sang sood be sung, at wan o dis uncan folk micht gie wiz a sang. We hae ta hae a lok o sangs at da supper, an da mair variety da better. Noo, alto its not my place in wan wye, I wid pirpose at dis young leddy sittin here—”

“ Be quiet, will you? said the Tittie. “ I have nothing to sing, and there’s no piano.”

“ Shu says—bit of coorse we never believe what da wemen says, you know—at shu haes nothin ta sing. Bit I know dats not da case. Shu haes a sang aboot love an a peerie boy—her een is no so very peerie, I ken dat muckle—at shu sings juist laek a lintie. Noo, I wid aks every wan here if der onything more shuitable at a wedding as a sang aboot love?”

Loud applause proclaimed the fact that the speaker’s sentiments met with cordial approbation.

“ Dan shu says shu haes nae piana. Wha is wantin a piana? My idee aboot singin is ta lat

da singer sing da sang bi himsell, an dan da folk can ken what its about. Forbye, if shu most hae somethin, dir a harmonicon yunder i' da corner, an I dootna at Miss G. 'ill be able ta play aa its needed—da less da better."

With this dubious compliment to her usefulness as an accompanist, Miss G., who was anxious that her friend should show her abilities as a singer, rose and went to the American organ, and knowing the song by heart, played the few bars of symphony. This was at once an entreaty and a challenge which the Tittie could not resist, and she also rose and made for going to the organ.

"I dunna ken if I'll lat ye laeve da table, do you know. Its not uswil at Shetland weddins fur singers ta geng edder ta wan coarnir or da idder o da room. Dey juist staand up, laek Ertty yunder, an lash her aff whaar dey ir."

"Jerry, Jerry," said Betty, who heard all this with evident disfavour, "mind wha du's spaekin til."

"Bit," continued her lord, in no way disturbed by Betty's appeal, "since it is sae, an ye most hae some kind o support, as dey caa it, I'se lat ye geng dis time. Bit mind, it's not uswil."

The Tittie's charming song, daintily sung, met with hearty and general approval. During its performance, Jerry, as was his wont, could not refrain from interjecting illuminating and descriptive remarks which created a good deal of amusement to those near him. He was getting "warmed up," and in fine humour to enjoy everything going. At the end of every verse he loudly

applauded the singer; and at the close, when she came and sat down beside him, he patted her on the shoulder saying, "My jewel, da thing couldna a been dune better. Ony een can see at ye're made fur a singer, perteeclarly aboot love. Naebody, as I'm said, could a don it better—"

"Except yourself, perhaps," said the Tittie, who was pleased that she had done so well, and that her song had given so much pleasure.

"Weel, as ta dat, I widna say. Bit never you mind; feth, you'll maybe hae a peerie—"

"Jirry Laurenson, will du howld dy tongue?" entreated Betty, in a tone in which anger was mingled with horror at what she knew was coming.

"Ye'll be needin somethin efter yon, I mak nae doot. Will ye hae a drap o screachan, or a air o wine?"

"I'll have neither, thank you. We're not like you men, who are either smoking or drinking whenever you get the chance. I'll take a drop of lemonade."

"Weel, dats drinkin in a wye, too. Alto hoo ony person can go an fill demsells wi a swash o cowl'd lemonade, perteeclarly at a weddin, is more as I can understaand. If ye canna tak a drap o comfort at a weddin whar in Heeven's name can ye tak it? Dats what a weddin is fur, maistly."

"Oh, Jirry, Jirry, doo is wan," said Betty.

"Our friend, Mr Laurenson," said the bridegroom, "is a good hand calling on others to sing. We all know that he himself can sing a song in a way that very few can touch. He sings them with action, and vigour, and as I have heard, he 'gives

them sheet.' I propose that he gives us the next song." (Thunderous applause).

"Do you need a 'stiff gless' for this one?" asked the Tittie.

"Na, my jewel, I'm hed a taestin afore, an I'm juist feelin fine."

"Are you going to give the Deil?"

"Na; he's ower heavy fur a weddin. Da Deil taks ower muckle oot o you; alto I widna say bit what I may gie him yit afore da nicht is don. I tink mesell at da folk sood raelly tank da Deil dis nicht, fur he most a cuished away or gon away wi da hale baand o da excisemen in da country afore dae got sae muckle guid liquor. I assure you, my jewel at ye ir, da Deil is a very usefil body. What wid da ministers do ithoot him? Dir caalin wid be gon."

"What are you going ta sing, then?"

"Oh, I'm juist goin ta gie dem a ould sea song, 'Da Princess Royal,' at I assure you da men here 'ill laek naar as weel as your peerie boy."

The P. M.'s rising was the signal for an outburst of applause, for his singing was not confined to the Commercial Room of Huxter nor his fame to Tingwall. Jerry had been well-known in North-mavine for many a long day as a first-rate exponent of the kind of songs that the people liked. Taking a "taestin o whisky," "juist a good swalley, ye know," notwithstanding the fact that the wife of his bosom, who sat almost opposite, did not appear to eye the operation with much favour, and wiping his moustache and beard with his hand, the P.M. began.

On the fourteenth day of April,
We sailed from the straand,
In the bould "Princess Royal,"
Boond for Newfoondlaand
With forty brave sailor boys
For a ship's company,
From the eastward to the westward
Richt bouldly sailed we.

Oh, we scarcely had been sailing
For days two or three,
When the man at the mast-head
A sail he did see.
She büre doon upon us,
Richt on us she büre
And under her mizzen-peak
Dark colours she würe.

"Oh, God," says wir Captin,
"What, what shall we do?
For this he is a Pirate
And he'll make wiz heave too."
"No, no," says wir chief mate,
"Dat never sall be so,
For we'll shake oot wir reefs, boys,
And from her we'll go;—
We'll shake oot wir royal sails,
And foresail also."

So when dis bould Pirate
He hove alongside,
With a loud-speaking trumpet,
"Whence come you?" he cried,
Wir chief mate ran aft,
And did answer him so—
"We come from the freeaands,
And we're bound for Callao."

“ Then haul up your courses,
And lay your ship too;
For I have a letter
To send there with you.”

“ I’ll haul up my courses,
And lay my ship too
Inside some safe harbour,
But not ’longside of you.”

So we shook out wir royal sails,
And foresail also,
We shook out wir reefs, boys,
And from him did go.
She fired wan shot efter wiz,
In the hope to prevail;
But the bould Princess Royal
Soon showed him her tail.

Oh, he shaisted wiz an shaisted wiz
For all that long day;
He shaisted wiz an shaisted wiz,
But could make no way.
He shaisted wiz an shaisted wiz
Till night made him stay;
He shaisted wiz an shaisted wiz,
And he then bore away.

“ Thank God,” said wir Captain,
“ That Pirate is gone;
Go down to your grog, boys,
Go down every one.
Go down to your grog, boys,
And be of good cheer,
For while you have sea-room,
My boys, never fear.”

Jerry had not proceeded far in his vocal narra-

tive until audible expressions of approval and enjoyment were heard, particularly from the older men. Waxing warm in his subject, and giving "her da action, ye kno, da action," necessary, the P. M. made a most successful appearance. Even Madam became interested as the story unfolded itself; and when the singer came to the lines—

" For we'll shaak oot wir reefs, boys,
And from her we'll go,"

when he swept, as it were, the pirate from off the seas with his left arm, and hurled defiance at him with his right, emphasising action and words by repeating both with greater vigour and fuller voice, several shouts were heard, "Well don, Jirry. Give it to her; give her sheet. Splendid, man; splendid. Ah, dir non at can du it laek da ould man; he knows what he's spaekin aboot." This sort of thing went on during the song, until at the last verse, when the P. M. sang the four lines,

" Go down to your grog, boys,
And be of good cheer;
For while you have sea-room,
You have nothing to fear,"

with vigorous dramatic action the excitement increased, and several of the older and some of the younger men got on their feet and gave vent to rousing "Hurrahs! Good old Jirry! Dat's da way ta du him."

"Another great and outstanding success," said the Tittie. "You should have been on the stage—a great operatic singer."

"As ta dat I kno not. I never toucht o dat caalin whin I wis young, an I'm ower aald noo, I doot. Maks you tirsty, dis singin, do you ken," he said, as he took a "sype."

"I think, now that we have had these fine songs," said the bridegroom, "that we might have a speech." (Hear, hear).

"I was just thinking of that myself," said the Chairman, who was in the best of humour. "And I know that no one can give a better speech on an occasion of this kind than Mr E., our literary member. (Great applause). He is a bachelor, and therefore knows probably more about the fair sex than a poor married man. (Laughter). ("I winder if he kens mair as Ertty Maikomson," asked the P. M. of the Tittie, in a whisper). At any rate, he has the advantage of looking at the matter from a detached point of view, and is therefore able to give an impartial and unbiased opinion."

Thus called upon, Mr E. had no option but to respond. He got up, and after wiping his spectacles, put them on again and addressed the company in a speech in which his abilities shone to advantage.

"The Chairman of the Peat Commission," he said, "had stated that one reason why he (the speaker) should address this company was that he was a bachelor, and therefore should know more about the fair sex than married men. To that aspect of the question he would refer later. (Laughter). But how did the Chairman know that he might confine his remarks to the fair sex? Was it the fair sex who were to be congratulated

on an occasion of this kind? Was it always the lady who had to be complimented? (Applause from the ladies). Certainly not. He rose to convey his heartiest and warmest congratulations to the bridegroom on having won, after having wooed, the lady who was now his bride, who as Burns so beautifully, in one of his most exquisite poems, said, was now

“ The brightest jewel in his crown.”

(Applause). I congratulate him (Mr E. continued) from what I know of the lady, who I am sure will make a good wife, and will, I have no doubt, look well after him; for so far as I can see, married men need a lot of looking after. (Roars of laughter). (“ That’s for you,” said the Tittie to her companion). Some of them are a wild, obstreperous lot. They dance and they sing, and they sing and they laugh, and carry on in a way that no staid sensible bachelor, like myself, for instance (laughter), would dream of doing. This they generally do, I must admit, when their good ladies are not about; when the ‘ jewel ’ is at home, and they are abroad. Whether this effervescence, light-heartedness, and jollity, is due to the fact that they know they are married; or whether it is simply a sort of recoil from married conditions, I will not pretend to say. But my experience has shown that married men as a rule need the guiding, firm hand of a wife, one who can keep a strong hold on them, and restrain them from stewing in the exuberance of their own folly. (“ There you get it.”) (“ Feth, he

doesna ken muckle aboot it.”) And probably the reason why bachelors are bachelors, is that they need no such restraining hand (“hear, hear,” from three voices at the same moment). They, as a rule, we know are quiet, sensible, inoffensive men, who (“nae lass wid gie a fardin fur,” interjected the P. M.) who—who.” (“Juist so. Ir ye gaen ta lat your chap dee a bachelor?” “Certainly not. He needs looking after.”)

“But I congratulate the bridegroom for another reason. He has succeeded where many men fail. He has sought for and won his jewel, which now so brightly adorns his crown. This is an achievement which many men fail to accomplish. I myself, for instance, have been looking for a jewel of this kind for many long years, and haven’t found it yet. (“Feth, your no lookid very far, fur dir plenty o dem, alto dir a big differ i da whal-ity.”) I have hunted and hunted over the globe I may say (“I winder if he ever tried ony o da black kind; dey can buy dem, dey say, fur twartree pound apiece”) but so far without success. I admit I have sometimes come very near finding what I was looking for; but for some reason or other it always eluded me. Either my standard was too high, impossible of attainment, or they thought I was one of those impractical, visionary individuals who would not make a good husband. (“Dey wir white right dere.”) (“Oh, Jirry, Jirry, whan is du going ta hould dy tongue?”) But I am not without hopes yet. (Laughter and applause). Up here in Shetland, where the air is so pure, the people so kind, and the hearts so

true, perhaps some jewel will come my way yet. ("Feth, we'll hae him mairied ta Meggie yet; wait you. Dat 'ill be da next weddin, I assure you, my joy. Da man haes no sense, you know, an he needs somebody ta look efter him. A woman laek Meggie, at can cook—fry herrin, boil a tattie, mask tae, an mak a fatty brunie ta perfection, an kens hoo ta tak care o things, is a aacht,—a rael aacht; an dats juist a different name fur a jewel. Mrs E., Mrs Literary Member, you know. Feth, dey'll be a set ipun Meggie yet. Wait you." ("Hush.") ("What's he sayin noo?")

"But whether this comes about or not; whether the Fates provide me with a partner or leave me in single blessedness, all I know about the fair sex is very little. ("Dat is true, in faith.") An eminent writer once said that all he knew about the ladies was that he knew that he didn't know anything about them at all. ("He's hed some sense dat man; winderfil sense, fur dis writin bodies haes non at ever I kent o, da maist o dem.") And he was a married man, too. ("Dats why he said it.") Now, if a married man could say that, how can I, a poor bachelor, presume to have even the slightest knowledge of the sweetest, dearest, most engaging, most elusive, most aggravating, most dominating creature on the face of the earth? All I can say is that without her this world would be a poor, drab, woe-begone place. Life would be robbed of its joys, its pleasures, its interests. In short, ladies and gentlemen, without the ladies we would all die up in a few years ("Dir nae doot aboot dat. Dat's why—") ("Quiet; you're interrupt-

ing.”) Therefore, while primarily congratulating the bridegroom, I will ask you to rise to your feet and drink the health, in three times three, of the bride in particular and the ladies in general. The ladies; God blëss them.” (Prolonged applause.)

“Oh, heth, we sall du dat. Bit I tink, do ye know, we’ll better keep da bridegroom be himsell. Dat can be anidder tost, ye ken.”

The toast was drunk with great enthusiasm, amid cries of “Lang may dir lum reek.”

“You said,” said the Tittie, when they sat down again, “that Mr E. had no sense.”

“Dat I did.”

“No sense? You surely cannot mean that a man like Mr E., who has written and published books, and is a very learned man in many ways, has no sense.”

“I baith tink it an say it. My jewel at ye ir, da man ats been huntin da best pairt o a life-time aa ower da glob fur a wife, an no gotten een, must be waar as wan hevin little sense—he moust be a fule. Fur its no fur want o weemen, da Loard knows. Fur my pairt, I could a gotten a score ony time.”

“But he was looking for the particular one that Providence had made for him.”

“Weel, he’s been sae dirty perteeklar at he’s no gotten da perteeklar wan he’s been stimin fur dan, yet. Bit he’ll get her efter aa. Meggie is da woman ats been made fur him. An bi aa appearance shu’s da very wan he needs. Meggie hes sense—soond sense. Shu’s been brought up

in a school whaar dey hae ta learn, whidder dey laek it or no."

"It would be a good joke if Miss Maggie was to be the future Mrs E. But Maggie couldn't help him with his writing."

"No; bit shu could pit somethin in his mooth, an see at da body wis lookid efter, an dats mair important."

"I think," said the clergyman, who had hitherto been an unobtrusive but interested participant in the proceedings, and who had made himself very agreeable to those near him by his genial ways, "now that we have had three songs and a speech, that the bridegroom himself will have to favour the company. (Hear, hear). I don't know whether he sings or speaks best. I'm inclined to think that he will prefer to sing; for, as we all know, at his own wedding a bridegroom is often speechless. He is so overcome by the weight of happiness that has fallen upon him, that it is no unusual thing for him to be utterly unable to utter more than a few words. ("Feth, he shun gets ower dat," interjected the P. M.) But far be it from me to suggest which line he should take. No one will be more delighted to hear a speech from our worthy friend than I; or a song, or both. But one of the two, I think, he should give." (Applause).

The bridegroom, who had seen something of the bright side of life in the various cities he had been in, having always made a point of going to music-halls and popular concerts, rather fancied himself as a singer, for he had a very good voice,

and was fond of music. He knew a "good thing" when he heard it, and he had learned and treasured in his memory many songs, both old and new. One of these older ones, "White Wings," he felt would just suit this occasion. He therefore got up after being called upon, and having cleared his throat, began.

Sail home, as straight as an arrow,
("Heth du's don dat," said the P. M. sotto voce.)

My yacht shoots along on the crest of the sea;
Sail home, to sweet Maggie Darrow,
In her dear little home she is waiting for me.
("Shu's waited lang anof, I can tell dee.")

High up, where the cliffs they are craggy,
There's where the girl of my heart waits for me;
Heigh, ho! I long for you Maggie,
I'll spread out my "White Wings" and sail
home to thee.

Yo, ho! how we go!
Oh, how the winds blow!

"Join in the chorus, please."

"White Wings," they never grow weary,
They carry me cheerily over the sea;
Night comes; I long for my dearie;
I'll spread out my "White Wings" and sail
home to thee.

Many of the young people knew the pretty melody, and joined heartily in the chorus; while their elders, who were unacquainted with it, got in a note here and there, which all added to the

enthusiasm if not to the harmony. It was comical to watch Erty Maikomson. Erty was just supremely happy. Lowra wasn't too near; the liquor was excellent, and the pipe divine. He sat beaming on everyone, his honest face suffused with a smile that did one good to look at. Being a singer himself, he felt that something was expected of him; and in the second line of the chorus he got in "cheerily ov—" and then waited for the next line. The note being a high one, Erty made a grab, as it were, for it, but succeeded only in getting a part of it; but nothing daunted, he came in on the word "dearie," where he paused again, had a good look at his glass, and entered with fine effect on the last four words, which he pronounced, "si-al hom to thee."

("Man, da chap is doin fine. A fine sang dat. I don't think I could do it better myself. See you Erty. Erty is juist happy. He's hain wan fine nicht in his life, at ony rate, poor sowl.")

Sail home, to love and caresses,

When Maggie, my darling, is here at my side;
Sail home, blue eyes and gold tresses—

The fairest of all is my own little bride.

("Oh, shu's ower weel.")

Sail home, to part from thee never,

Always together life's voyage shall be;
Sail home, to love thee for ever!

I'll spread out my "White Wings" and sail
home to thee.

Oh, how the winds blow!

Yo, ho! how we go!

“ White Wings,” they never grow weary,
They carry me cheerily over the sea;
Night comes; I long for my dearie;
I’ll spread out my “ White Wings ” and sail
home to thee.

The chorus to the second verse was taken up with fresh energy and heartiness. Most of those present now had a good idea of the air; and it was remarked that Lowra and Betty lent their voices to swell the refrain. The Literary Member joined in in his not unpleasant voice; the Chairman added a bass note here and there; the Tittie’s and the high-heeler’s voices were heard clear and full above them all; and the imp, carried away by the prevailing enthusiasm, swaying his body and arms to the waltz-time of the tune, bawled at the pitch of his voice, and held on to the last note after all the others had slipped it. The chorus was so successful that it had to be repeated, and was sung again with renewed gusto.

“ Man, dat’s splendid. He’s don rael weel. A fine owld song. I laek da owld songs; dir som sense wi dem. Some o dis dirt at you hear noo-a-days nobody can tell what its aboot. Alto dir some o dem no sae bad. Bit yon “ White Wings ” is a fine thing.”

“ You should learn it, and make it one of your songs,” said the Tittie.

“ I don know. It’s mair fur young men, tryin ta get howld o a lass. I’m anchored, ye see, lang ago. It wid du your chap fine, though. Can he sing ta ony sense?”

“ You heard him at Huxter, didn’t you?”

“ Oh, yae, yae, dat’s true. No sae bad; no sae bad. Nae deept in him; I mean, he didna hae da bess voice, ye ken.”

During this colloquy the bridegroom had sat down amid loud and prolonged applause, and taking out his handkerchief wiped his face, for the room was now pretty warm. The bride gave a pleased and expressive “ hunss ” as he sat next her which proclaimed more plainly than words that she was a proud woman; her future lord had shown the company assembled that he could hold his own with the best of them.

“ Efter dat,” said the P. M., “ I tink dir juist wan thing at haes ta be don. An dat’s ta drink da bridegroom’s helt.”

“ I second dat motion,” said Erty, who somehow or other imagined he was at a meeting of the Parish Council, of which he was a member.

“ I say we’ll drink da bridegroom’s helt. Folk, rise ta your feet. I tink he deserves it. He’s mairried a fine young woman; he’s gein wiz a splendid weddin; an he’s sung wiz a boanie sang. Noo, da man at can du da laek o dat is wirt somethin. For alto its a aesy anof thing ta get a wife o wan kind or anidder, its not sae aesy ta get da richt wan, an some men never manage,—becaase dey dont hae da wit,—ta get ony at aall; an alto its aesy anof in a wye ta gie a weddin, dir some men sae near-be-gaein at dey widna du it even whin dey could; an alto its aesy anof ta brüil an mak a noise wi wan’s voice, feth its not a aesy thing ta sing a sang richt. Noo, da bridegroom haes don da hael tree things in a richt an proper

wye; an I say, Drink his helt. Never may he or da wife be waar."

Needless to say, the toast was drunk with the utmost heartiness, the Literary Member striking up "For he's a jolly good fellow," in which all joined.

"Do you know at Mr E. is comin oot o himsell? He's mair kind o human da nicht as I'm seen him," said Jerry to the Tittie.

"That's probably because he's among ordinary human beings."

"Very laekly dats true, my jewel. He's laekly spent da most of his life rütin an stimin in-ta books, an didna ken at da world aboot him was far mair interesstin. Books is richt anof i dir wye; bit aa at dey can du is ta tell aboot human beins an what dir don an what dey do, an what dir said an what dir sayin. Bit wait you. Wait till we see him far gone on Meggie. I tink I ken hoo ta wirk da pair o dem. Ye see, Meggie, laek aa da weemen, wants a man—"

"Wants a man?"

"Yiss; wants a man. What more sensible want could shu hae, I wid laek ta ken? An he, poor sowl, doesna ken hoo ta get a wife, an yet I believe da objec is wantin een, an needin een, aa da time. Noo, whin you get a pair in dat state, da folk ats aboot dem doesna hae muckle sense if dey canna bring dem tagedder."

"I don't think that Meggie would make a suitable wife for Mr E."

"My jewel at you ir, you don't kno. Sometimes dem at folk tinks wid be da most unshuitable

turns oot ta be da most shuitable. Ye can never tell. Ye never can tell, I assure you. Noo, its my opeenion at da raeson he's no fun a wife, is becaas he's been goin huntin an stoorin for wan at could spaek aa manner o languages, an could maybe tell him whaar dis wurd cam frae an da next een guid til; or could tell aa aboot owld history, wha's faider killed some idder body's bridder, an da very day an da very oor; or wha lived here; or wha robbed somebody dere; or maybe aa aboot what animals is made o, or hoo lang da rocks took ta mak; or maybe aa aboot da stars an da firmamint o heeven. Bit bliss you, my Tittie, what sensible woman is carin fur da laek o dat? Da weemen at gies demsells ower ta dat kind o thing, is anof,—I mean dir appearance is anof—ta frichten a man, even a body laek dis Mr E. Na, na, aa dat deep things haes ta be left ta men. Weemen doesna hae da head fur it. Dir no made dat wye, ye ken."

"Thank you; you are very complimentary."

"I'm juist spaekin da wuids o truth, my dear. Dis scienteefic woomen is no weemen ava. You hae naethin o dat aboot you, an dats da wye at ye're sae nice, ye see. Dere's da high-heeler, neo—"

At this moment a voice was heard—"A speech from the chairman," which request was unanimously applauded.

"Heth, I expec if da Chairman gets up, he'll gie Mr E. 'wan i da eye,' as da boys wid say, fur what he said aboot mairied men."

The Chairman rose amid applause and

addressed the company. He said this was the first Shetland country wedding he had ever been at, and he must say he was enjoying it immensely. They had had in addition to the interesting marriage ceremony itself dancing, and singing, and speeches. They had had a speech from his friend, the Literary Member of the Peat Commission. It was a good speech, in some ways an excellent speech. There were some things in it, however, which showed that the speaker, although a learned man in many respects, was profoundly ignorant in many others. ("I tould you dat.") He said he hadn't been able to get a wife. (Laughter.) Why? He is not so very bad looking (laughter); he is big enough; he is certainly old enough ("dat's intil his hide"); and it is not for want of means. What, then, is the reason? Is it because he is too serious? Is it because he does not sing and laugh, and dance and play, in the way he said married men so much affected? Because he is so much engrossed in matters outside ordinary human affairs that he has never given this supreme question his earnest attention? Because whenever he saw a girl, he wondered whether she knew Sanscrit, or Latin, or the dialects in use in the East two or three thousand years ago; or knew how the earth was constructed; could speak glibly and learnedly of the neolithic age; of the poetry and art of the ancients; the history of the Persians, and could tell everything that is known about the differential calculus? This is not the way to court a girl, or get a wife.

"Now, for myself (the Chairman went on),

I am not a poet, or a literary man, or a musician, or an astronomer, or any kind of that band of 'kittle cattle'. I am just an ordinary, plain individual. My reading consists mainly of company reports, and the newspapers, and a novel now and then. I am not sure whether it was Homer or Virgil who wrote the 'Iliad'; about history I know very little, about astronomy nothing, about the science of language less than nothing. My knowledge of mathematics extends just as far as the mutiplication table. Yet I had no difficulty in getting a wife. ("Dats juist da same as meself. Feth, I hed a wale among dem, afore I fixed on Betty"). I believe I could have got half-a-dozen. ("Nae doot aboot dat.") One, however, is generally found to be enough at a time. ("Solomon didna tink dat, though.") But one is necessary. Why? Because man was not made to be alone. As Mark Twain said, 'There's a deal of human nature in man,' and in order to develop it completely he should have a partner. Therefore it is the duty of every man to look for a wife ("no ta mention every woman lookin fur a man.") and get one, and keep a hold of her ("heth, he doesna need ta du dat"). This is why married men are so human, and nice, and jovial, and considerate, and self-sacrificing, and patient. ("Oh, yiss, yiss, dir aa dat.") And the want of this is the reason why bachelors are so peculiar, and thrawn, and awkward ("an ill-vyndid") and frequently sour ("an wizzened").

"Now, what our Literary friend has to do, in order to keep himself in line with respectable mem-

bers of society, is straightway to begin to look for a wife in the right way—in the right way, remember. Apparently, he has little knowledge of the proper method of procedure. But we will help him. I for one will give him all the assistance within my power; and I have no doubt that Mr Laurenson, our Practical Member, will lend him the benefit of his long experience and expert knowledge. (“Oh, heth, I’s du dat.”) Then, when we have got Mr E. fixed up, and made into a real human being, with a wife and responsibilities, we will, I predict, see him blossom out like the rose, and take his place among those who carry the burden of the world on their shoulders. My dearest wish for Mr E. is to see him married to a nice Shetland girl,—a sensible girl, one who can shake him up and make him realise that the world contains more things than verbs. He may yet learn the language of love; we may yet see him in the gloaming kissing his adored under the shade of a peat stack. (Loud laughter). We may, and I hope we will at no distant date, dance at his wedding, and see him and the partner of his joys and sorrows trip the light fantastic toe in a way that will put us all to shame. (Loud applause). (“We’ll dance at Meggie’s weddin afore tree monts is ower, my jewel. Wait ye you.”) I believe that with training he would yet make a very good husband, although it is hardly likely he would ever come up to the standard reached by say our practical friend; that is hardly to be expected. But he will learn, he will learn through time. The one thing needed is that he should make a be-

ginning.” (Loud and prolonged applause).

“Dat’s up his sleeve, I tink,” remarked Jerry, as the Chairman sat down and took a sip of liquor feeling that he had successfully upheld the dignity of the married state while shooting several arrows at his friend, some of which, he was sure, had gone home and pierced his armour.

“After that most excellent speech by the Chairman,” said the minister, who, it may be remarked, was also a married man, “I hope we will be favoured with another song. The speeches should be interlarded with songs, and the songs with speeches. And if we get both of a quality equal to those to which we have listened, I would say that this will be one of the best weddings ever held in the Shetland Islands. Now, I love to hear the old sea songs, sung by the old sailors. Several of these, men who have braved the stormy, treacherous ocean, and have faced many dangers and escaped many perils, are here. I am not asking too much, I hope, when I call upon one of them for a song.” (General applause).

“Maikie Twatt, dere’s dee shance,” said Jerry, in a loud whisper to an old salt who was sitting a few feet from him. “Du’ll hae ta get up, an tak dee share. Feth, du can du it weel anof tu, I kno dat, fur I’m heard dee afore. Come on wi ‘Ranso.’ Come away.”

Thus adjured, Maikie had perforce to make an attempt. He was rather bashful in such grand company, old as he was; but he felt that he would have to do something, seeing it was well known to most of those present that at country weddings, he

was looked upon as a sort of sheet anchor in the matter of singing songs. So, rising and coughing to clear his throat, he began,

Ranso, was a queer young feller,
Ranso, boys, Ranso.

"Noo, folk," he said, "ye'll hae ta join i da chorus, mind."

"Yae, yae, dat sall we."

He could not be a sailor,
Ranso, boys, Ranso.
So they shipped him on board of a whaler,
Ranso, boys, Ranso.
But he could not do his duty,
Ranso, boys, Ranso.
Then they took him to the gangway,
Ranso, boys, Ranso.
And they gave him six-and-thirty,
Ranso, boys, Ranso.

In every "Ranso, boys, Ranso," the whole company joined with great heartiness and gusto, which assistance, along with the "drop o' liquor" he had had, put Maikie in the very best of form. He warmed to his subject as he proceeded, and got so excited that he almost unconsciously added some of "da action, ye know, da action," so much insisted upon by his old friend Jerry. Anyone coming near the house while the song was being sung, and hearing the chorus sung by the whole company without restraint, would certainly have paused and listened with pleasure.

"He most a been a wheer chap, dis Ranso.

Of coorse noo an agen ye du come across a man at's no wise, alto its no aften; bit it certainly needs baid sense an wit ta be a sailor. An feth, I know dis muckle, dey needna tink at onything can du on a whaler. No, no, far from it. When ye get fixed till a 'richt' whale, an da line peyin oot laek lightning, an da sea comin ower you in sheets laek 'fa send da boat ta da boddom, an a moorin caavie comin on, an da ship lost sicht o, an a gale brewin, feth, ye need aa da wits at da Loard gae you, an as muckle mair as ye can get a howld o. Ah, min! da Greenlan days! Dat wis da days! Ah—! I wis juist laek a young selkie—I could staand onything, an du onything. I could even kiss da lasses, du you ken, aboot dat time."

"Dear, dear. That was a most heroic thing to do."

"Feth, I tell you it is dat, wi some o dem. It takes a pooer o what da ministers caas moral courage ta make up a man's mind ta du da job, alto of coorse if it haes ta be don, da best wye is ta du it whick an be don wi it. Ay, ay. Does du mind Maikie, dat day at we got fixed wi a eichty-fitter in da Wast Ice?"

"Du I mind? Du I no mind? Ay, man, dat wis da day. We hed a heavy day dat day, Jerry—a heavy day, truly. Twaal oors i da boat ithoot a morsel ta aet accep a drap o cowld tae, taerin an rowin, swaetin an toilin till we wir naar dead. Doesna du mind at we haed ta hise Lowrie Biglan oot o da boat, wan lump o ice, he couldna move a finger, inta da ship. Bit we got da whale though; we got da whale. We did. Dat wis

da days, Jirry. Dat wis da days."

"It wis dat in truly."

"Now, see here," said the Tittie, "we're not going to have two old men sitting sighing over the past, recalling all they did when they were young and very foolish, and no doubt very stupid. This is a wedding, you must know; not a funeral."

"Weel, dir some folk at says at wan is juist as bad, or as gude, as da idder, juist as ye look at it. I don know. Heth, I'm seen a funeral as lively as a weddin. I'm seen some funny things in mi day."

"Oh, you've seen many strange things, and no doubt you will see many more yet. But the point is just now that we are at a wedding, and the wedding has to be got through in a proper way. Are you not going to ask Miss G. to sing."

"Heth, do you kno I nearly forgot aboot her. Oh, yiss, yiss; Madam most gie wiz a sang. Bit we'll no tak yon 'Braid' thing. Shu'll hae ta sing somethin else."

"Well, ask her."

"I tink," said the P. M., addressing the company, "at its time noo fur wan o da young leddies ta gie wiz a sang. We're hed fower sangs frae da men, an only wan frae da lasses; so I tink its dir turn. Noo, I wid pirpose at Miss G. gies wiz a sang. (Hear, hear). Shu's a fine player, an shu sings tu. So I hoop shu'll no refuse."

Miss G., who seemed well pleased at being asked to sing, rose and went to the instrument and sang in a charming style Balfe's bright and dainty "I'm a Merry Zingara." The song suited Miss

G. in every way. The light, pretty melody, with its equally pretty guitar style of accompaniment, was just what she revelled in; and knowing the piece by heart her performance was such as to delight everyone.

"Madam can lash aff yon kind o sangs weel," said the P. M. "Dir nae doot aboot dat. An dan da instrument; shu can truly mak her spaek. Yiss, yiss; shu can du dat; bit aa da sam—"

"Aa da sam? All the same, I suppose you mean. What precisely do you mean?"

"I juist mean, my jewel, at da man at taks her 'ill hae most o da cookin an da lookin efter o da hoose ta du himsell."

"But she may get a husband who can afford to provide a cook and a housekeeper. A wife has no right to be cook and housekeeper, and general slavey to any man."

"Maybe no. Aa da sam, da wife at canna be baid wan an da idder, is nae wife ava. An heth, da most o da weemen is ower bled ta get da shance, sae far as I'm seen."

"You're an old sinner."

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," said the bridegroom, "the night is wearing on, and I see that most of you are looking forward to more dancing. Before we leave the supper table, and clear the decks, I would just like to hear Mr D. in a song. I have heard that he is a great singer, and we certainly most hear him." (Loud appluse).

Going to the organ, where Miss G. still sat, and looking over a book of music, Mr D. selected the rollicking old sea song, "Ben Backstay," in

the chorus of which he asked the company to join.
If they did not know it, they would soon learn it.

In splendid style he sang—

Ben Backstay was a bos'n,
He was a jolly boy;
And none as he so merrily,
Could pipe all hands ahoy.

Chorus—With a chip, chop, cherry chop,
Fol-de-rol, riddle-rop;
Chip, chop, cherry chop,
Fol-de-ral, ray!

Once sailing with a captain,
Who was a jolly dog,
Our Ben and all his messmates got
A double share of grog.

Chorus—With a chip, chop, etc.

So Benny he got tipsy
Quite to his heart's content,
And leaning o'er the starboard side
Right overboard he went.

Chorus—With a chip, chop, etc.

A shark was on the starboard side,
And sharks no man can stand,
For they do gobble up everything
Just like the sharks on land.

Chorus—With a chip, chop, etc.

They threw him out some tackling
To give his life a hope;
But as the shark bit off his head
He couldn't see the rope.

Chorus—With a chip, chop, etc.

At twelve o'clock his ghost appeared
Upon the quarter deck;
"Ho, pipe all hands ahoy!" it cried,
"From me a warning take."

Chorus—With a chip, chop, etc.

"Through drinking grog I lost my life,
The same fate you may meet;
So never mix your grog too strong,
But always take it neat."

Chorus—With a chip, chop, etc.

"Feth, I always do dat myself. I never mix mi whisky; I juist tak her as shu comes oot o da bottle. An do you kno—of coorse ye canna ken muckle aboot it—at da most o dis whisky noo-a-days is sae mixed afore ye buy it, at if ye pat ony watter intil it at aal, it widna be da taste o whisky ava. Man, Mr D. can sing. He haes a fine wye wi him, and a braw voice. We're hed a fine supper, an a lock o splendid sangs. See you Erty Maikomson. He's juist neebin."

"Neebin? What's that?"

"Dear bless my boady! Du no ken what neebin means? Da eddication noo-a-days is no muckle wirt, if a person laek you doesna ken what neebin means. Neebin means nearly sleepin; harly fit ta keep your eyes open, ye ken."

"I see."

"Erty haes hed a good dram, ye see, and he's naar asleep. Hillo, Erty, is du no gaein ta get up an hae a dance, min," asked his old friend, as he rose and went up to him. "Dir goin ta clear da decks noo."

"Clear da decks? I'm not carin whedder dey clear da decks or laeve dem alon. Du sees, Jerry, I'm been up da Baltic."

"Yiss, I know dat, Erty; an dus been at Wheebec, an da Straits, an—an—California."

"Oh, yiss, yiss; yiss, yiss. Whaar da orange palms—is it palms, Jerry, or is it groves—I canna mind—grous. What does da hyme say, Jerry; what does da hyme say?"

'Whaar every prospec plaeses,
An only man is vile.'

Dats whaar da oranges grows, du knows. Feth, I wiss I hed wan diss moment. Bit man is born ta sorrow as da spark flies upwards. Dats a paraphrase, Jerry, du knows. Never du mind, Jerry; I'm been up da Baltic. Bit nevermore fir me. Nevermore."

At this moment Betty, who saw how matters stood, came up and asked Erty if he wouldn't have a cup of tea while they were getting the room ready.

"A cup o tae. Oh, yiss, I can tak a cup o tae, noo, or ony time. Bit I maun spaek wi da bride an da bridegroom. I'm never shakkin haands wi dem yet." And going up to the newly-married couple, Erty, with a warmth and effusiveness which amused and at the same time greatly pleased them, for the third time congratulated them on their entry into the state of matrimony. "Dir plenty o rocks ahead, you know; plenty o rocks; bit ye'll juist hae ta steer as weel as ye can." And with this sage advice, born of ex-

perience, Ertly followed Betty into the ben-end, where, after giving him a cup of strong tea, she got him to lay himself on a resting-chair, where he soon was sound asleep, dreaming of orange groves, Greenland whales, and Baltic pine.

“Noo, bairns, come on; come away an get dis place cleared. Dis ’ll never do at aall. We only hae da wan nicht ta dance, an he’s nearly twal o’clock noo, so we’ll hae ta hurry up. Its no laek da good ould days, whin we hed tree days; dat wis da time. A person hed time ta get mair-ried dan.”

“Three days and three nights,” ejaculated the Tittie, in astonishment. “Bless my heart, where did all the guests find sleeping accommodation? They couldn’t all go home and come back again, surely?”

“My dear at you ir, dir wis nae difficulty a-boot dat. Da Loard pervided da sleeping accommodation, as ye caa it, juist as He does mony anidder thing. Noo, Meggie, come away, and gie wiz a haand. Du maun hae da first reel wi me, whin we get started. Efter dat, I’ll laeve dee ta fend fur deesell. Bit dir nae faer o dee. Du can shak dee muslins as weel as cook a brunie and mask tae. Da men shune kens a lass at can dance.”

The room was soon cleared and made ready for the dancers. The fiddler got under weigh, after having been given a “warmin”—(which he did not need, for he was warm enough), and struck up the inspiring strains of the “Floors o Edinburgh.”

“Noo, Meggie, my joy, here we ir. Shak up, an lash at. Dere shu goes. Reel O, an reel again. He’s shanged da reel, du hears. ‘Behint da Daeks o Voe,’ wan o da ould eens. Heth, I’m no sae able ta dance as I wance wiz; bit Betty is doin fine wi da Chairman. Very douce an whiet, Betty is, an shu can hould out weel. Reel O wance again. ‘Kail an Knockid Coarn,’ bairns, dis time. So. So be it. Wan more reel ’ill du me, I see dat. ‘Aff shu goes ta Meramachee.’ Dats a fine een. Noo, Meggy, I tink we’re don very weel,’ as the fiddler drew the long-bow which proclaimed that that dance was at an end.

“Weel, an hoo did ye laek da bridegroom ta dance wi,” asked the P.M. of the ‘Tittie, after he wiped his brow and got his breath.

“He’s an excellen̄t dancer. I can see that. He will likely be able to dance a quadrille, or some other sensible dance, and not confine himself to this exhausting work called a Shetland reel.”

“I don know. Maybe he can; an if he can, he’ll laekly try afore da nicht is done. Bit look ye you. As I am a sinner, dere’s da Leetrey Member taen Meggie up fur da neist reel. Noo, juist you sit still, my jewel, and hae a gude look at dem baith. Dey’ll be some fun yit afore da nicht is done.”

CHAPTER LI.

The Wedding Festivities close, and the P. M. "gets da faimly cairtid hom bi laand."

When Mr E., the Literary Member, asked Meggie up for a dance, he did not have much idea of what he was to do, or how he was to get through it. But he felt it was hardly right to sit still and not make even an attempt to join in the fun that was going on. It looked churlish; and by nature Mr E. was anything but that. He had, in fact, hidden under a rather reserved and what some people called an aloof manner, which had grown on him unconsciously through his immersion in books, a warm, kindly heart; which only needed the touch of ordinary human beings to quicken into life. He was, as the P. M. remarked, "more human" to-night than he had ever seen him, because he was taking part in the innocent pleasures of plain folk, getting more into touch with people who knew vastly more about life and its many ups and downs than books could tell.

Strange as it may seem, he had been drawn to Meggie from the first time he met her; and the interview he had with her in the kitchen had only strengthened this feeling. For he felt that Meggie stood for all that was practical and sensible. There was no nonsense about Meggie. She had

been brought up, as another admirer of her's, Jerry Laurenson, had said, in a school where she had to learn, whether she liked it or not. She had been up against the hard facts of life all her days, and had learned the lesson these hard facts teach. But although this had been Meggie's fate, it had neither soured nor hardened her. Her native disposition of kindliness and good nature was still there, although from her manner at times one would not have thought it. And she was as eager to join in a little fun, or give herself up to any innocent amusement, as many a girl half her age. Despite her somewhat brusque manner and straight way of saying things, Mr E. felt that Meggie was one of those who could be relied upon; one who would face a storm bravely, and do her duty faithfully. He therefore felt, realising his ignorance of the intricacies of the Shetland reel, that he could not do better than ask Meggie to be his partner.

Meggie was not very sure of the kind of partner a man would make who had shown such a complete ignorance of the habits of hens; but she knew that at any rate she could dance the reel, and would be able to keep him, to some extent at least, right in its performance.

When the pair got up, and before they took their places, Mr E. said—

“And—and—Miss Maggie, what precisely do you do in this local dance?”

“What do we du? We dance.”

“Yes, yes, I know; but how do you dance?”

“Hoo du we dance? We dance juist laek ony oardinir human beins.”

“ Yes, I know; but what particular step is used? Every dance has a step of its own.”

“ Step? I dunna ken o ony perteeclar step. I tink dey juist dance bi da law o natir, da sam wye as a infant. Da first thing a infant does is ta dance, afore its gotten its feet; afore it can walk. So whin folk dances dir juist duin what da Loard meent dem ta du.”

“ Really? There is something in that. And yet there are some people who object to dancing, and say it is sinful.”

“ Da folk at says dat is nivir read dir Bibles, or seen a bairn. An da folk here juist follow da law o natir an da commands o da Scriptir. Dey hae nae steps, da most o dem, bit juist jimp up an doon. Although I’m heard some o dis young chaps at’s been awy spaekin aboot da hoarnpipe, an da Hielan Fling, an da—da—da—I canna mind what. Bit dir wan thing ye hae ta du. Ye hae ta reel richt.”

“ And how do you reel?”

“ Weel, I could harly tell you. Bit we’ll geng i da middle, an aa ye hae ta du is ta follow me. Da lasses aye ken, ye ken, what ta du.”

“ Oh yes. And I noticed that when the turning went on, the young men put their hands—or some of them did—on the shoulders of the young ladies. Is that a part of the dance?”

“ Oh, dir nae haerm in it. It ’ill no du a lass ony faut, dat.”

“ Then, do the—do the young—young ladies like—like,—not—not object?”

“ No, heth, dey dunna objec. No dey. Aa

ye hae ta du is ta du da sam as da rest. Watch da idder men."

After these instructions, Mr E. and Meggie took their places, and the reel began, the fiddler "settin fae him" in "Da Deil Amung da Tailors."

"Keep your eye open, my Tittie," said the P. M., who had been watching Meggie and Mr E., "takin in aa dir manoeuvres," as he said. "Dir goin ta mak fur it noo. Wait ye you. Bit heth, dir juist wan peety."

"What?"

"If I could a gotten him a stiff gless afore he began, we wid a seen some fun."

"We'll perhaps see some fun without the stiff glass."

They did. Mr E. was very observant; and being conscious of his ignorance, was careful to imitate in every particular the antics of those near him. As the two male partners on either side of him were young fellows of about 23 who had been "sooth sailin," were in the pink of health, and were at the wedding to extract every ounce of fun out of it, and had moreover had more than one "stiff gless," their dancing was of the kind which may be described as being more boisterous than graceful. At one time one would be doing the hornpipe while the other was trying the clog-dance; at another they would stick their thumbs in their sides and "lash at" in the most furious manner, every now and then letting off some of their exuberance of spirits in terrific "hoochs." When the tune changed cries of "Reel O" rent the air;

the girls moved off, making the figure of 8 in their evolutions, their male partners following with their hands on their shoulders, the perspiration running down their manly faces. During the playing of the first tune the Literary Member noted carefully all that was done, danced quietly and gracefully, and followed Meggie like a lamb. In the second "set-to," however, the tune for which was "Da Sailor ower da Rough Tree," he "lowsed" in fine style. He danced the graceful Highland fling step; he snapped his fingers; he did the quiet quadrille step; he jumped high up; he turned round like lightning; he attempted both the horn-pipe and the clog dance; neither of the other males in the dance could give a louder or more joyous "hooch," and his "Reel O" excited the warmest admiration of the whole company for its tone of whole-hearted jollity. This went on until he showed unmistakable signs of getting done up; but although his young fellow dancers seemed to have legs of steel, and had evidently no intention of giving up for some time, he would not give in. At the fourth tune he repeated in loud tones, after hearing another say the words, "Ahint the daeks o Voe," waving his arms as he started to reel, leaning his hands heavily on Meggie's shoulders, during all the evolutions.

By this time the rest of the company had sat down, tired, and the honours lay with the set in which Mr E. and Meggie cut so prominent a figure. They were therefore the cynosure of all eyes, Mr E.'s evolutions, gyrations and ejaculations eliciting the warmest admiration of all, as well as creat-

ing great amusement. In one "Reel O" where the partners lost each other, Mr E.'s frantic efforts to get hold of Meggie, which he ultimately succeeded in doing, created loud bursts of laughter. Meggie was now evidently feeling the strain, but she held on, and danced as lightly and tripped as gracefully as any girl in her teens; but it was equally evident that Mr E. was determined not to be outdone by the two sailors, for although the perspiration was streaming down his face, and the front of his collar was at the back of his neck, he danced on until the fiddler in mercy slowly drew the bow over the strings.

Jerry and the Tittie may be likened to Tam o' Shanter during this dance. They got as excited as that worthy personage when he watched the dance in Alloa Kirk; and like him, when it was over, they exclaimed, in tones of hearty approval, "Well don, Mr E.," "Well don, Meggie."

"Feth, I kno wan thing. Meggie's opeenion o Mr E. is gon up a braw bit efter dis. Far farder as if he'd written twinty books. Da man haes a sowl intil him efter aa. He can dance, an hae a bit o fun. Noo, my jewel at you ir, your next dance is wi me."

"No, your next dance is with me."

"Weel, what's da differ."

"The differ, as you call it, is, that instead of I having to exhaust myself in a Shetland reel, you will come and dance a quadrille with me."

"A what?"

"A quadrille. A sensible dance, where there

is both art, and grace, and beauty."

"Weel, fur my pairt, I'm wantin nedder da wan or da idder. I hae plenty o beauty ithoot it, fur Betty alwis said at I wis good lookin,—ta idder folk, ye ken; bit forby. I know nothin about da thing. What du ye do?"

"I'll soon let you know that. You sit here till I come back." And rising and going to the Chairman, Mr D., and the bridegroom, the Tittie set the ball rolling for a square dance. The other lady partners were the bride, the high-heeler, and a girl who had been "in a place" in Lerwick for four weeks and therefore knew all about the terpsichorean art. A single set was thus secured, and Mr D. asked the fiddler if he could play a set of quadrilles.

"A set o what?"

"Quadrilles. A square dance, you know."

"I kno nothin about sware dances. I can juist play a Shetlan reel. If ye'll tak dat, ye can hae it. I ken nothin else."

"That'll do. But will you notice that when we clap our hands, you have to stop."

"I canna stop till da tune is don."

"Oh yes, you can stop at any time."

The fiddler struck up, the partners took their places, the Tittie "leading into" Jerry, and the dance began. The bride and bridegroom, neither of whom was much at ease, danced with a solemnity and deliberateness which showed they felt the "seriousness of their position" in endeavouring to uphold the dignity of their native parish in the eyes of strangers; Mr D. and the girl who had

been in Lerwick were almost right, for he knew precisely what to do, and she had the perception to watch and trim her sails; and the Chairman and the high-heeler were quite in their element. The P. M. was the person who gave the trouble. The dance was entirely new to him, and, it must be confessed, he made a poor shape at it. When he had to move to the right, he usually went to the left; when he had to stand still he moved and danced; when he had to bow, he stood still and smiled. During most of the dance he got hopelessly mixed up; and the last figure he could not understand at all. He did not see why girls other than his own partner should rush into his arms, and run off with him. The Tittie had a bad time with her friend, notwithstanding all her efforts to keep him right, and every now and then told him good-humouredly that he was an "old stupid." To the fiddler, too, the dance was an offence. The stopping the tune in the middle went much against the grain, and at the third figure, where they clapped like thunder to make him stop, he exclaimed, in tones which every one heard,

"Da deevil tak dis folk. Dey winna gie a person time ta play da tune."

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked the Tittie of her partner.

"Tink o it? I tink it's da greatest lok o dirt at ever I wis in i' mi life. Dir no sense wi da thing. Ye tak up a lass, an ye're nae shuner begun ta get under wye whin shu rins aff ta some idder man; an anidder lass, at ye dont want, comes rinnin up an taks hould o you. Dir nae dancin in

it. Dir no time fur it. A body is nae shuner gotten intil a kind o a step as somebody claps his haands, an da thing is don. An as fur da last thing—a figir, dae caa it, a figir. Loard guide me! Its mair laek bairns playin Jinga Ring. Wan lass efter da idder comin rinnin up an taking you aboot da neck an haulin you away, whin ye want ta staand an dance! An rinnin aff wi you, whidder you want ta go or not. Of coorse I ken dat's juist da wye o da weemen; bit dir nae juist sae ootspoken wi it usually. Whin I want a dance, I laek ta dance, an keep a howld o da lass at I took. I dunna want ta be shued aboot laek a bad hapny. No, no, not fur me, yon madrim."

"Oh, you don't have the sense to see the beauty and the grace of a dance like that."

"I don't want ta hae da sense, dan, or da grace eddern. Commend me ta a skin-bow."

The ice having been broken by this, the first set of quadrilles, there were others in the company, who had a desire to have another of the same. These were mostly young people who had "travelled"—who had been, some of them, in the south, and some in Lerwick, and had learned to trip the light fantastic toe in dances other than the Shetland reel. Two young fellows, who wished the members of the Peat Commission to understand that genteel dancing was by no means unknown in the parish of Northmavine, went to the fiddler, who was very angry, and got him mollified with a "air o balsam," set others on the move; and it was not long before a double set was on the floor, eager to show their skill. And right well they showed

it. They went through the various figures in a style that astonished and delighted the strangers, who imagined that dancing of this advanced type was unknown "in these remote parts."

"Damn dis gird reels," said Maikie Twatt, who had "got a drop," and was itching to have a real, live skin-bow. "Dir no shance fur a person ta hae a richt dance amung aa dis deevilry."

"I say wi dee, Maikie," said his friend, Jerry. "Go du an tak up Lowra. Come ye wi me, my jewel. We'll hae wan rael dance, an maybe mair as wan, afore da nicht is don."

At this moment Erty Maikomson, who had just wakened out of his sleep, stepped from the ben end, and seeing his old friends, Jerry and Maikie, on the floor, and hearing the fiddler striking up "Kail and Knockid Coarn," yokkid hould o da first lass in his way, and led her to the floor with a stentorian and full-blooded "hooch." "Shak your muslins, mi beauties," he added.

The beauties shook all the muslins they had on, and Erty, Jerry and Maikie renewed their youth like eagles, and danced with a vigour and heartiness which filled many of the younger men present with envy. They were soon joined by others, and in a few minutes, "rael dancin," as Jerry called it, was soon in full swing again. This, with occasional interludes for rest and refreshment, and with the variation of a quadrille or two, and one waltz, was kept up till the early hours of next morning.

"Weel, my Tittie, an hoo ir ye feelin noo," asked Jerry of his friend about 8 o'clock.

"Oh, I'm tired, and sleepy, and—"

"Maybe hungry an thirsty."

"I'm not hungry, bit I'm very thirsty."

"Dat's da warst wi dis weddins. Da dancin maks you thirsty. Dats da wye da men hae ta tak a drap o drink. Its not becaas dey want it, or laek it, at aall; bit juist becaas Natir cries oot fur it. Never you mind, my jewel, you'll be aa richt whin you get your man. Heth, you'll better hurry up, fur I want ta dance at your weddin. Oh, yiss, yiss. An sometimes I don't feel sae soople i da joints as I wis wint. Whan wir ye tinkin a mairyin, an whaar wir ye gaen ta hae da weddin?"

"Oh, go and get me a little lemonade, for goodness sake, and take me home."

"I'se du dat, truly. I could kerry you hom, fur dat maiter. You're no sae big." After the Tittie had sipped a little lemonade, and was feeling refreshed somewhat, she asked the P. M. what he meant to do with Betty?

"Heth, I wis tinkin we wid juist tak Betty an da bairns hom be laand wi wiz ta da hotel. Da motors 'ill be here noo, an w'ell shurly get sweezed in some wye. Bit Meggie an Mr E. most get taggedder. We'll hae ta fix dat up."

"Do you know I think that Mr E. has rather got a notion of Maggie."

"I'm gled ta see at da objec haes dat muckle wit. Da man at gets a howld o Meggie gets somethin, I assure you. So, I suppose we'll be goin an shakin haands aa roond. Dir juist aboot feenishin up. Weel, I will say wan thing (addressing the bride and bridegroom loud enough for those about to hear)—We're haed a most splendid, rael

Shetlan country weddin. It's been graand. I widna say at I wid laek ta see edder wan or idder o you mairyin agen ithin a year—no, no; bit I know at dis weddin is set aa dis lasses juist mad ta hae wan o da sam kind. Here's Miss F., noo; shu says shu most be mairied afore tree monts is ower—”

“Take no notice of his nonsense. All the same, when I do deign to change my state of single blessedness, I think I'll insist on having a real country wedding.”

“You couldna du better. So, bairns, gude moarnin, an blissins bi wi you. Come away, an see if we can get da faimly stowed in an cairted hom.”

The “faimily,” whether Jerry was thinking only of his own, or the Peat Commission and his own besides, were stowed in the motors somehow, at an hour when most people were preparing breakfast, and, as he said, “cairted hom,” i.e., to the hotel. They were all rather tired and sleepy; but not one of them would have foregone the pleasure they had had at the wedding for a goodly sum. Each and all had entered into the fun of the proceedings frankly and freely, with a desire to be pleasant and sociable, and to witness at first hand the festivities of a country wedding. In no way were they disappointed. From the Chairman to the imp and Joanie—who both had had a grand night—the event was one which each felt they would never forget, but would always recall with the pleasantest of memories.

“See you Meggie,” said Jerry. “Shu's

tryin ta pit da frunt o Mr E.'s collar under his chin, frae da back o his neck. Meggie canna bear ta see a thing wrang, ye ken. I believe if da King cam alang da road wi wan o his buit laces loose, at shu wid geng up and pit da thing richt. A tidy, carefil woman is Meggie, wi no nonsense aboot her. Feth I know dis, though. If shu does tak yon man, shu'll hae plenty ta du. Shu'll hae ta wirk aboot him as if he wis a bairn. Of coorse dats wan o da main things at weemen laek ta du. Noo, waken up, my Tittie. Here we ir. Here's da hotel, an ye can geng ta bed an dream o weddins fur da next forty-eight oors."

CHAPTER LII.

The P. M. and the Tittie have a talk with Meggie.

After tea, the P. M. sauntered into the kitchen to have a crack with Meggie. The whole party had had a long and refreshing sleep after their hilarious labours, and after a substantial tea, had spread themselves "all over the place," some in and some outside, for further rest, gossip, and interesting reminiscences of the recent great event. Betty and the bairns had been sent home by motor, for the animals had to be attended to, "wedding, baptism, or funeral," notwithstanding, as the P. M. said.

"Dat's da wye o da country folk, you know," he stated oracularly. "Dir not laek some o dis idder folk at can lie an sleep da most o dir days, an it doesna muckle maitter whidder dey waaken or no. Folk at haes a croft, or onything to du wi da laand, HAES ta get up an wirk, whidder dey laek it or not. Da animals canna wait, 'an feth dey lat you know at dey winna wait; an da saisons winna wait. No, no; dir got ta be attended til at the richt time. Since da baand is aa occupied wan wye an anidder, I'll go an hae a crack wi Meggie, an see what shu's tinkin aboot." Lighting his pipe, Jerry made his way to the kitchen.

He found Meggie sitting alone before the fire,

her head resting on her hand. She was gazing into the blazing embers, apparently in a very reflective frame of mind.

"Hillo, Meggie. What's up wi dee?"

"Up wi me? What's wrang wi me?"

"Dat's juist what I wid laek ta ken. Du's sittin glowerin i da fire yunder mair as if du wis tinkin aboot a funeral as da weddin we're been at."

"An canna a person sit an look i da fire in paece ithoot tinkin aboot funerals or weddins eddern?"

"Dir nothin ta stop a person sittin on dir tumb, if dey can manage it. Bit its no naetral fur a young woman to sit aa bi hersell an stoor i da face o da fire efter haein a ploy at a weddin, as we hed da streen. Dir only wan reasin at I can tink o fur sic wheer ongoin."

"An what's dat?"

"A lass at does da laek o dat, if shu's no mairied already, most be tinkin o what shu's lost bi bein single. Shu's aetin her sowl oot, an da only cure fur dat at I ken o is fur her ta get a man as whick as she can."

"Oh, fur you men. You tink at da whole world is made o nothin bit men."

"Weel, irna we richt?"

"No, ye're not richt. Ye're as far fae richt about dat as ye ir wi everything else. Sae far as ever I'm read, or heard o, aa at men does is ta fecht an kill een anidder. If dir no fechtin wan wye dir fechtin anidder. I tink at dir best aff at's clear o dem, fur dir a most oondependable baand."

"Weel, my Meggie, da funny thing is at most

o da weemen tink da idder wye aboot; an I hae nae doot dy ain private opeenion is very muckle da sam is dirs. Noo, I wid juist aks dee, as a sensible woman—fur du does hae sense—why is du no mairied? Wir dey ever ony chap at du hed a notion o, or hed a notion o dee?”

“Wha is gaen ta answer stoopid whestins laek dat? Every lass is a fule some time o her life.”

“Dat is true, my Meggie, an loks o dem aa da time, alto I’m not sayin at dir muckle waar as some o da men. Bit dir juist wan thing aboot da lasses at never mairies—dir naeboddy’s midder, an sometimes naeboddy’s sister, an naeboddy’s aunt, an naeboddy’s graandmidder—in fak, dir nothin at aall.”

“Accept demsells, an dat’s plenty.”

“It’s not plenty. I widna be a aald maid fur a thoosan a year.”

“Wha said I wis a aald maid?”

“I didna. Aa at I said wis I widna be wan meself. I harly tink dat condition is da best fur edder man or woman. Dey get kind o wheer as as dey grou owld—”

“Wha said I wis grouin owld?”

“Not me. Loard forbid at I sood say at ony woman wis owld, even mi nown midder. I hae mair sense as dat, I hoop. Bit I wis juist gaen ta hark somethin into dee lug. Bit of coorse its raelly mair fur a woman ta du as a man.”

“What wir we gaen ta say?” eagerly enquired Meggie, who was now getting really interested.

"I don't know if I can say it,—but here comes wan at can."

"You're here, are you? I have been hunting for you all over the place," said the Tittie.

"Yae, I'm here; and here is wir darlin Meggie too."

"Yes, Maggie is a darling. She came to the wedding; she was one of the great successes of the wedding; and she did a great deal more than either you or I could do. I assure you there's not many girls could do what Maggie did last night, in the short time."

"Bairns, what is da maitter wi you? What are you hintin at? Mair as you! What did I du mair as you?" asked Meggie, now thoroughly roused.

"I wis juist beginning ta say da very sam mesell, whin ye cam in. Bit I couldna get mi tongue aboot it very weel. Dir is een or twa things at weemen can du better as men; dir nae doot aboot dat. An dis is wan."

"Jerry Laurenson, will du edder tell me at wance, or dan howld dee tongue?"

"Na, I'm no gaen ta tell dee. Shu'll tell dee. Alto, in my opeenion, du doesna need ta be towld at aall. Du kens weel anof already."

"Kens weel anof already. What du I ken."

"Now, now, Maggie. Come away. You needn't pretend that you do not know that you made a complete conquest of Mr E., the Literary Member, last night."

"Conquest? Da man is in fair bruck. He's don. Sees du here, my Meggie. If du doesna

mairy Mr E., it 'ill end in dee being da death o him. I'm heard at dis owldish men, when dey tak dis love fiver, its very hard on dem. Dir no laek da young chaps—dey canna throw it aff aesy. Dats da wye wi most fivers. Da owlder ye get, da warss ye ir."

"Bairns, Loard love you, will you—will you juist tell me what you mean?"

"We're just meaning what we're saying, Maggie, nothing more and nothing else. Anyone could see with half an eye—"

"Half a eye? Ye didna need even a half a eye. Ye felt it. Ye didna need ta see it."

"—That Mr E. has taken a violent fancy to you. In common language, he's over head and ears in love with you."

"Raelly, I dont know what ta say. I tink you're baith geen oot o your judgmints."

"Didna he tak dee up fur a dance?"

"Weel, what o dat?"

"An hooch'd, an jimpid, an kerried on laek a young fule whin he wis dancin wi dee."

"Da gritter fule he."

"Dat's whaar du's wrang, Meggie. Whin a owldish man taks on as yon, an hoochs, an capers, an sings oot afore da lass at he's taen up fur a dance, its becaas he canna help it. He's feelin da love fiver in his blod, doesna du see; an he wants ta lat da lass ken at he's as young ipun his fit as da best o dem."

"You ir a pair o—"

"An didna he pit his haand ipu dee shooders?"

"Yes, and didn't he arrange to get a seat next you in the motor?"

"An I toucht I saw him pittin his airm aroond—"

"Now, Jirry, non o dat. If da man did it—"

"Ah, noo, dere du is."

"It wis juist a mistak. He was reachin ower fur somethin."

"And didn't I hear him asking you at what time in the evening you were usually disengaged?"

"He did aks somethin laek dat; bit I took nae parteeklar notice o it. He's juist wantin ta aks me somethin aboot country wyas, an things as dat, nae doot."

"Noo, Meggie, my jewel—"

"I'm no your jewel. Shu's your jewel."

"My jewel, I hae loks o jewels; bit ye twa ir my parteeklar jewels. Weel, I wis gaen ta say, du doesna fink at we're siccan fules as ta tink at du tinks at du can mak wis tink du doesna ken at da man is in a bad wye. Noo, da only thing at 'ill cure him is fur dee ta gie him what da weemen caa a bit o encouragement. If dir wan thing a woman kens better or whicker as anidder, its whin a man is gotten a notion o hir. Dats i da blod o every wan o dem. Feth, does du ken, whin I wis walein amung dem, afore I settled—"

"Oh, fur you an your walein. Heth, da lasses wisna ill ta plaese whin ony o dem buddered dir heads about you."

"Weel, what I was sayin wis dis. Da man most get a air o encouragement, caas he's kind o blate. He's bashfil, an he's no been used ta da

wyes o weeman, an feth it taks a lok o experience ta ken muckle aboot dem. Bit ony richt woman, laek deeself, can—can—ah—well, can help a bit, does du see. Mak da crookid paths strecht, du knos, as da scripiter says; an fill up da vailleys an level doon da moontins."

"An why sood I du edder da wan or da idder?"

"Weel, I don know, I'm sure. Why sood du not? Haes du ony parteeklar ill-will at da man?"

"No, I don't think it."

"Is du sae weel plased we dis place as ta bide here and cook and clean, an clean an cook, an varg an wash till du's laid i dee grave?"

"No, I'm not."

"Is du sae weel aff at du can tak a hoose o dee nown, an live ipu dee money?"

"Na, na, sae muckle is da peety. I hae nothin."

"No, no, Maggie, you're made for something better than this. You should have a home of your own. You should be among the honourable band of married women," said the Tittie.

"Yiss, an maybe somethin more honourable as dat still," put in Jerry.

"Oh, Jirry, Jirry, will du howld dy tongue. Bit aa at ye're sayin is a lok o foally, I assure you. Why sood Mr E. tak a notion o da laek o me? What can da laek o him see inta me?"

"Niver du mind what he sees inta dee. Dats a thing at nobody is been able ta tell yet,—why ony parteeklar man taks a notion o a parteeklar

lass. Aa dir laer is no fun dat oot, my Meggie. Da point is, what does du see into him?"

"Oh, he's a braw body."

"He is dat, trully, I can tell dee. Woman, dir harly a thing i da world da man doesna know."

"Heth, he doesna ken muckle aboot hens, I know dat."

"Dere du is, Meggie. Dat's da very point. Dat's why da Loard is made him fur dee. What he doesna ken, du kens. Dan he's written books. I dunna ken hoo mony, bit dir a lok."

"As fur dat. I'm sure I'm no carin."

"Maybe no; bit idder folk is carin. An I can tell dee, he maks a lok o money oot o dem, an dats mair ta da point. An dan he's a kindly kind o a sowl. An doesan du tink its very funny, Meggie, what he said in yon speech at he made at da supper. He said he'd been lookin over aa da whole world fur a wife, an couldna fin een, an noo he's come here he's settled ipun dee."

"Settled ipun me? Dats as much as ta say I wid tak him. He's no even aksed me, folk, yet. You are a pair o—o—. You're trully lost your wits."

"Weel, weel, dats ta come; we ken dat. Bit what I wis wantin ta point oot ta dee, wis, at he's no a oardnir person, an mair as laek his coortin 'ill be kind o wheer too. He'll no hae da wyes o da lads roound aboot here, does du see; an laekly whin he's most anxuous an aaber ta fin favour in dy eyes, du knows—du knows what I mean—du micht tink at he wis juist da very opposite. So what I want ta impress ipu dee is dis—gie da man

what wan wid caa a fair shance. If du doesna care fur da man, or tinks at du couldna do wi him, dan of coorse da thing is don. Bit if du feels richt, I assure dee at du's goin ta get a shance at mony a lass wid gie her soul fur."

"Oh, bairns, bairns, spaek nae mair," said Meggie, with a sigh expressive of many things.

"Dan see hoo weel ye're matched. What ne doesna know du kens, an what du doesna ken he knows. Dan he's not too owld, an du's not too young."

"Bairns, bairns, spaek no more."

"Then, Maggie," put in the Tittie, "look to the prospects before you. When you get settled, Mr E. would likely purchase a property—maybe an estate—in Shetland, where you would live in a large, comfortable house; and he would have a house in London; and you would live in London part of the year; travel on the Continent another part; and come to your country house in Shetland for the rest of the time."

"Yiss, an heth, we'll come an bide wi you. I'se tak Betty an da bairns an come edder ta London or da hoose here fur a mont, or as lang as du laeks, every year. Du'll hae servants dan ta attend ta dee. Du'll say ta wan go, an shu goeth; til anidder come, an she cometh. No more vargin an washin an cookin fur dee, my Meggie."

"Yes, you'll be a lady, a fine lady, very soon, I'm convinced of that. I cannot tell you, Maggie, how glad I am over your conquest, and your good fortune. All you have to do is to put out your hand and grasp it. And, Maggie dear, you de-

serve all you can get, and more. We'll see our Maggie a great lady yet."

"Ah, my bairns, dat's juist whaar I wid be oot o mi place. I couldna be a fine lady, an be da mistress o a great hoose."

"Meggie, non o dat. Du's got ta keep in mind at du haes sense—midder wit. An du man be dressed, dat's aesy don. An heth, du'll mak a good show whin du is dressed. Bliss my hert, woman, I'm seen da pictures o some o dis great leddies in London, an heth, I toucht very little o dir appearance. Some o dem wis mair laek a piece o board as onything else. I assure dee, whin du's dressed up, du'll look as weel as da most o dem, an better as mony a wan. Dan fur deesell, aa at du haes ta du i da hoose afore uncan folk is ta say nothin—juist look dignifeed an howld dee tongue. I assure dee dir more sense in howldin wan's tongue as speakin, mony a time."

"Yes, then look what a glorious time you will have travelling. France, Italy, Switzerland, America. All you would have to do would be to say that you wished to go here, there, or anywhere, and orders would be given to pack up. You are a lucky girl, and in some ways I envy you."

"Weel, raelly, I dunna ken what ta say ta edder da wan or idder o you."

"Dan, my Meggie, looks du at dis. Whin ye're mairied, as I'm said, what he doesna know du kens. Noo, whin ye wir up here fur da simmer, as ye wid say, in your ain hoose, an Mr E. happened ta say at he wid geng oot an flit da hens, du wid be able ta tell him, of coorse, at it wis da

kye at hed ta be flitted; an if he said at he wid geng oot an pit da kye in ipu da baaks, du wid tell him at it wis da hens at guid ipu da baaks, no da kye. So du could keep him richt da wan wye, an he keep dee richt da idder—i da wye o wirts laek, an spell-in, an things o dat kind. Dan, firby, du can cook, an look efter da servants an see at dey don't mak a bruckle o dis an spoil da next thing, an destroy good food. An du can keep a hoose. An what more under da canopy o heeven does ony man want?"

"Oh, Jerry, Jerry, fur dy madram an foally."

"I assure dee its nedder da wan or da idder. An heth, spaek o da Deil; here he comes. So, lat me licht me pipe an go. Shu's gon oot wi aa dis spaekin. Come ye awa, mi jewel, an lat Mr E. pirceed wi his coortin."

"Yiss, it is a fine nicht, bit I tink dir goin ta be a shange, bi da look o da sky i da nort wast. Miss Margaret? Meggie? Oh, shu's i da kitchen yunder, busy as uswil."

CHAPTER LIII.

The Commission gets the P. M. out of a Domestic Difficulty.

“ And how are they all at home?” asked the Chairman of the P. M. next day at dinner.

“ Oh, dir no sae bad i dir helt. Bit I see a shange ipu dem, some wye or idder. Dir not da sam as dey wir.”

“ How is that?” asked the Tittie. “ What’s come over them?”

“ I don know. Dir a whenks ipu Mary at’s nedder moaderate or aesy; an Betty wis in a tirry-mirry; an even Joanie wisna himsel. He wid sit an stoor i da fire wi his haands in his pockets, an dan rise up an geng oot an glower aboot him, an dan come in an sit doon again. Restless, ye know; restless. Dir somethin ipu da boy’s mind.”

“ You said there was a when—when—whenk —,” asked Mr E.

“ Whenks, you know; whenks.”

“ Well, what is that? What is the meaning of that extraordinary word?”

“ I’m sure I don know if I could tell you. it means a lok; bit I can harly explain it ta you. Shu wid rise up, an shu wid turn roond an geng oot; an nae shuner wis shu oot as shu wid be in again, dan shu wid sit doon an begin ta knit, an

shu wis nae shuner taen up her wares as shu huved dem awy fae her; an dan shu wid tell Joanie no ta sit stimin i da fire; dan shu naar lamed da objec o a dug becaas he set ipu twa hens at cam in; dan shu naar killed a shicken at got anunder da restin shair wi a buit; an whin her midder spak til her, shu wis as tert as vinegar. Yiss, I never saw Mary laek yon i mi life."

"Whenks. I expect, is equivalent to our English word flounce—applied to one moving about impatiently," said Mr E.

"Maybe it is. Bit yon's da wye it takes dem."

"And what," asked the Chairman, "do you think is the meaning of this rather strange behaviour?"

"Oh, I began ta see what wis da meaning o it, richt anof. Ye see, dis furnatir at dir boucht is troublin dir sowls. It's aa lyin at Hillswick noo, ye ken; an dir what ye micht caa a most serious spekulation amung dem whaar it's aa ta be pitten. Mary wants da piana at wance, ye ken; an Betty is juist as aaber ta hae da chiffonier an da sattee. Noo, ye see, dir beginnin ta fin oot at da hoose is no big anof ta hould mair as wan o yon big things; an da wan is mad at da idder fur buyin sae muckle; an dir mad at da things is lyin at Hillswick an da folk spaekin aboot dem an lauchin at dem; an dir mad at haein ta mak me spend money makin da hoose bigger; an dir mad at what haes ta be addid ta da hoose canna be don as shune as ye can say Jeck Robinson; an dir mad, I be-

lieve, whietly, in dir own minds, at dir made sic fules o demsels."

"But, my dear sir, they haven't made fools of themselves, by any manner of means. It's only right and proper that Mrs Laurenson and Mary, with their natural good taste, should have nice furniture and nice things in their home. If the house is too small; if they have got into a little bit of a difficulty by being somewhat precipitate, they are by no means the first women who have found themselves in a similar position, and you are not the first man who has had to step into the breach to save the situation."

"No, feth, I believe dat. Da weemen is da boys fur makin you spend."

"Whom better could you spend your money upon," asked the Tittie.

"Dat is true till a certain extent; bit I don know. I don know what's ta be don."

"Done? You'll have to take immediate steps, not only to save the situation, but to save the piano and the valuable furniture. You cannot have valuable furniture lying put up in a damp store, for an indefinite time. The things will get ruined."

"Dir nae doot aboot dat. An dats wan o da things, I hae nae doot, at made Betty an Mary in sic a aet. Dey wir vexed ta think at da things wis gettin ruined."

"There's one thing that will have to be done instantly, as a temporary measure," said the Chairman.

"What's dat?"

“ You will have to wire for one of those iron buildings so much used now-a-days for many purposes. They are splendid. Very handy, made in sections, very easily fitted up. Two or three handy men can put one together in a few hours. They can be set anywhere. I know the address of a firm in Aberdeen who supply a great variety of these houses—in fact I have their catalogue here. All that is wanted is to select the size required; wire for it, and it will be here by next steamer.”

“ Splendid idea,” said Mr D. “ I know these houses. If you can just tell me, Mr Laurenson, what space you need, and how many compartments, we will soon find from the catalogue the very thing required.”

“ Weel, Mary must hae a room till hersell, dat’s sure, wi da piana; an Betty ’ill need een til hersell tu. Shu wid need a press, tu, fur da lame, da crookery, you kno.”

“ Here’s the very thing. Two nice rooms, with a small cupboard in the middle. The price, freight paid, is only £85, everything complete.”

“ Eighty-five pounds Loard forgive you. You dunna mean it?”

“ Certainly I mean it. There’s the figures. You don’t expect to get a nice, comfortable house of two rooms and closet for a few shillings, do you?”

“ No. Bit eighty-five pound is more as da price o da things.”

“ Perhaps so. But a house usually costs more than the things that are in it.”

“ Bit dis, don’t you see, is extrees.”

"Yes, but your appointment as a Peat Commissioner is an extra, one may say."

"Weel, dat is true; bit still, I hed no idee o dis at aall. I wis juist tinkin, comin fae hom, at I wid pit up a bit o iron shed kind o thing, you know, at da end o da hoose,—a corrugated iron roof thing, ye ken."

"I'm surprised at you, Mr Laurensen. Really, I am," said Mr D. "There's a fitness of things that must be observed, even in a crofter's house. The idea of putting a piano, and a chiffonier and all the rest of it in a tuppence-ha'penny, third-rate lean-to, with the rain coming in through all the nail-holes and ends, is too preposterous. Rather send the things back, and re-sell them."

"Faith, we cant du dat. Dir wid be no living wi da weemen at aall, if dat wis don."

"No, Mr Laurensen," said the Chairman, "the corrugated iron-room structure can be dismissed as entirely out of the question. For one thing, you wouldn't get the material for perhaps a month; and for another, when it was put up, it would be an atrocity—for a purpose of this kind. I see nothing for it, seeing the furniture has been purchased, and is now here, but to get this iron house, and wire for it immediately."

"The iron house, is, I understand," said the vice-Chairman, "only a temporary expedient, to save the furniture from getting ruined?"

"That is so. I expect that Mr Laurensen, and if he does not, the family will find, that an iron house, however nice and however suitable for cer-

tain purposes, is not a building to stand the rigorous Shetland climate in a place like Eshaness, which, I am told, is peculiarly exposed to the sea and tempests which sweep round these coasts."

"Oh, heth, dir few places laek Eshaness fur gettin da blasts o da wasteren ocean. Eshaness is a fine place i da simmer; bit i da winter. Weel, I'll never spaek."

"That settles it. This iron house will be got and put up, to save the furniture, and let the family have the use of it until a more substantial building can be erected. I think it should be wired for at once. I must say I myself have very great misgivings about good furniture, and particularly a piano, lying in a goods store for any length of time."

"Weel, I suppose it 'ill hiv ta be don. Dat's juist da wye. Wance ye begin wi wan evil, ye hae ta follow it up wi anidder."

"You don't call the possession of a piano an evil, do you," asked the high-heeler.

"I widna tink sae muckle aboot da piana, fur ye can get something oot o it; ye can get da soond o it. Bit yon idder thing is mair ta look at as onything else. An ye see, whin Mary began Betty hed ta follow. Dat's da wye wi dis weemen. Dir no paece wi dem, an dir no end wi dem. Non at aall."

"That's why they are so interesting," put in the Tittie."

"Maybe; bit faith da men is got ta pay fur it. An du ye mean ta tell me at dis iron hoose canna du aatagedder? at shu'll hae ta be taen away

an a ston hoose pitten up whin dir men ta du it?"

"We certainly do. But we are only wasting time," said the Chairman. "Mr D., will you see if the boy is there? This telegram must be sent off at once."

"Da folk dunna ken me."

"Perhaps not; but they know me. The house will be here next week; and I will take the risk of collecting the cash from you."

"I'm heard it said at a fule an his money is shune pairtid; an it appears ta me at I'm been a bigger fule fur da last tree weeks as I wis da rest o mi life afore, an, as Betty wid say, dat's no sayin little. What wi rig-oots, an stroods, an suits, an claes, an broches, an idder things, an noo dis piana an furnatir. Loard save me, as da money is goin laek shingle."

"Yes," said the Tittie, "but look how much you are earning. What's the good of money unless you spend it. And how could you spend it better than on your own family."

"Yiss, yiss, I know all aboot dat. Bit if I spend it aa noo, what 'ill da faimily say whin dey finn dir nothin left whin I'm gone? Dey'll say I wis a careless fule; an dey widna be far wrang."

"Now that the telegram is off," said Mr C., "wouldn't it be a good idea for us all to go over to this place, Eshaness, see the house, and come to a decision as to where the iron one is to be erected."

"That would juist be lovely," said the Tittie. "Nothing could be better on this glorious day. We might be able, among us, to get Mary out of

her whenks, and the mistress out of her tirry-mirry. We might even be able to put some new life into Johnnie."

"I think the suggestion an excellent one," said the Chairman. "We need some relaxation and fresh air after our labours of last night; for although the wedding was very enjoyable, some of it was really hard physical work. Mr D., you might be good enough to tell the Clerk to tell the boy to tell the chauffeurs to have the motors here at the earliest possible moment. Ladies, you can be getting ready while we are putting on our coats."

"Eshaness? Isn't it at Eshaness that some remarkable rock formations are to be seen," asked Mr E., who was looking very bright, whether as a result of his interview with Meggie or not, I cannot say. "I have been reading a book on Shetland, and the writer speaks of a place called the 'Grind of the Nav—'"

"Da Grind o da Navir. Oh, yiss, yiss, its ta Eshaness at ye hae ta go ta see dat wheer sight."

"Then there's The Holes of Scraa— Scraad— what is it?"

"Da Hols o Scraada. Oh, yae, yae, dir dere too. An Da Cannon; an losh bliss you, dir sights dere at I'm towld dir not da laek o ta be seen i da Breetish Isles."

"Any peats?" asked Mr D.

"Paets! Paets! Loard love you, dir more paets, o aa shape an size an whality an kind, as ony place in Shetlan. Paets! Ye'll no want fur paets."

“And rock scenery?”

“Rock scenery! Dir nothin ta match it onywhere in Shetland, an hunders o miles oot o it. I’m tellin you at dis folk at comes fae da sooth, dis towerists, ye kno, some o dem nearly go mad ower da place, whin dey see aa its dere aboot. Of coorse I don’t think at some o dem hes muckle wit at ony time; bit dir plenty o graand sights ta be seen dere, I assure you. Da Dore Holm, an da Drongs, an Stennis, an— o—oh. Da place is aa scenery.”

“Well, then, the sooner we get to it the better,” said the Chairman.

“Any birds,” asked Mr C.

“Birds!” said the P. M. “Don’t spaek o birds. Da rocks is alive wi dem. Every kind I tink, under da canopy o heeven.”

“Any fishing?”

“Fishin? Don’t mention it. Dir nothin laek it in Breetan. Da King ipu da tron couldna command better.”

“And nice people, like you and Betty, and Mary and Joanie,” put in the Tittie, as she entered the room and went up to her friend. “Come and let us behold this wonderful place.”

“Any Pictish Brochs?” asked Mr E.

“Picts’ Brochs! Accept Moosa, maybe, da best i da islands, staandin in a loch.”

“Any old churches?”

“Da very ewldist in Shetland—da Cross Kirk, built bi da Roman Cathlics.”

“For goodness’ sake let us go and see this extraordinary place,” said the high-heeler, “as

long as the day is fine. Are there any girls in this glorious place?"

"Lads, ye mean?"

"No, I don't; I mean girls."

"Oh, yae, we hae twartree o dem too. Dir a haandy thing ta hae aboot a hoose, ye ken. Bit da most o dem is run away ta do toon efter da lads."

"Here are the motors," said the Chairman. "In this place, according to our Practical Friend, we can get a further insight into the peat industry; we can study geology, and bird life, have some fishing, get a glimpse of ancient history, view grand scenery and generally add to our store of useful knowledge. An opportunity such as this should on no account be neglected. Knowledge of every description is always useful."

In a few minutes the whole party were on their way to Jerry's calf ground, the boy casting no pleasant look on the Tittie's other admirer, who had got a nice, comfortable seat near her, and who seemed to be thinking that all was right with the world, while she had every appearance of being perfectly willing to subscribe to that sentiment. This feeling seemed to pervade everyone, except the imp, and even he could not long resist the spell cast by the glorious weather, the grand scenery, and the new surroundings in which he found himself. By the time Jerry's cottage hove in sight, he had almost recovered his wonted cheerfulness, and a look from the Tittie put him completely right.

CHAPTER LIV.

Commissioners' Visit to P. M.'s House.

The run from the hotel to where the road come to an end near the houses of Eshaness did not take many minutes. The sight that met the gaze of the party was a striking one. Hamnavoe, guarded as by a sentinel by the Muckle Ossa, lay to the right, a picture in itself. The well-cultivated crofts, lying at the head and along the sides of the voe; the neat cottages, most of them thatched; the old-fashioned feally dykes; the peat stacks, many of them in course of construction; the cows, browsing every here and there; the glint of the sun on distant scarp and headland; and the quiet beauty of the scene, calm and peaceful, called forth exclamations of delight from every side.

"What a picture!" exclaimed the Chairman. "What a picture of repose and content. I imagine everyone living in this place must be a poet."

"Here's a dear little calf," said the Tittie as the party walked down to Jerry's "habitation."

"Faith, you'll better keep clear o him. He's juist slippid, an calves haes nae respec o persons, not even boanie young lasses. Do you know at wan o dis calves bruk a woman's airm da idder day -- I mean, he wis da means o brakin it. Na, na;

keep ye clear o da calves. Dir half mad some-times."

"What a nuisance these flies are," said the high-heeler, trying to flick away two blue bottles which had settled on her nose, one in each ear, and one almost in her mouth.

"Yae, da flees is kind o troublesome i da simmer time. Bit dats Natir, ye know; Natir."

"And where does Betty hold out?" asked Mr D. "Which is the house?"

"Oh, juist doon yonder. Ye see yon white hoose yunder. Weel, juist near dat een. Heth, dere's Betty i da door hersel, an here's Joanie com-in ta meet wis, wi da dug."

"Mary," said Betty, "as I'm leevin, here's da hale baand. Lass, da hoose 'ill not howld dem. Heest dee an lay da cloth ipu da ben-end table at wance. Dey'll hae ta get a cup o tae. An pit tae i da tae pot; an bring in da milk; an set doon tumblers, an bread an butter. Noo, dis comes o no haein da things up fae Hillswick. Hed da new lame been here, instead o lyin dere, dey aa could a got tae at da sam time. Dir only fower cups an saucers i da hoose. Fir sic a hearin."

By this time the party, with the exception of the imp, who, along with Joanie, had rushed off to the "banks," had reached the door of the P. M.'s "abod," headed by the Chairman, where they were met and warmly welcomed by Betty and Mary.

"Dis is a shange fae your graand hotels, I wid say," said Betty. "Dir not saets in wan room fur you aa, fur dis is juist a poor crofter's hoose, an we're no used wi sic a whantity o folk at wan time,

so I doot some 'ill hae ta geng ben an some but. Bit ye're aa mair as welcome till it, sic as it is."

"Mrs Laurenson," said the Chairman, "I hope you will spare us apologies of any kind whatever. We are not looking for an hotel and don't want one. We want to see a real country house; and I must say, if they are all like this, the people of Shetland should be proud of themselves."

"Thank you, sir. It's no very big; bit we juist du da best wi it we can."

"You do; that's quite evident. It was, in fact, partly in connection with the size of the house, as well as to see you and the place, that we have come over to Eshaness."

"Oh, yiss. Bit widna ye hae a gless o milk. Da wadder is very hot, an it 'ill refresh you."

"Thank you, I daresay we could do with that too, if its not too much trouble. The ladies are always ready for a cup of tea."

"Heth, I see little differ wi dem an da men noo-a-days," put in Jerry. "Da wan is as bad as da idder. Bit I tink ye'll better come ben, an hae it wi a coarn o mair comfort, as ye wid say."

"No, no; thank you. I'm here, and here I remain. We can take a cup of tea where we are, and discuss the business we have come about at the same time."

The tea was soon ready, Betty inwardly praying that two-thirds of the company would take milk. Mary, however, had stepped into the breach to save the situation, for she had slipped out and borrowed half-a-dozen cups and saucers from the next neighbour, and was therefore ready for all emergencies.

The impromptu lunch was soon under way—tea, fresh milk, bere-meal bannocks, girdle scones, biscuits, ginger bread, and fresh butter, being disposed off with an avidity and relish which showed that the members of the Peat Commission had a keen appreciation of what was good, Betty and Mary anxiously and assiduously supplying their wants.

“This is delicious,” said Mr E., “this fresh butter and fresh milk. I really think I’ll take a croft here and live in peace and comfort. You seem to want for nothing.”

“Fur paece, ye’ll get plenty o dat, accep i da winter, an dan ye’ll know what she is. Fur a croft; yiss, a croft looks weel anof i da simmer time, wi fine wadder, an everything grouin, an fresh milk an butter, bit its not gotten ithoot laabir, I assure you. An firby, dir no man at needs try ta wirk a croft ithoot a wife, you know.”

“Well,” said the Chairman, with a twinkle in his eye, “Mr E. can get a wife, surely.”

“Yiss, bit can he get wan o da richt kind? Dat’s da point. It’s wan thing fur a woman ta sit an write twartree letters on a machine, an anidder thing ta varg an wirk a croft,—dell an harrow, an kerry, an milk, an knit, an look efter da hens an kye an da sheep, an bake an cook, an keep da habitation goin richt. Yae, yae, dir a differ. Bit, I daarsay, if Mr E. wis raelly tinkin dat wye, siccan a thing could be funn. Plenty o lasses at knows hoo ta du da wark o a croft; alto, I most say, a lok o dem is rinnin awey fae it. An I dunna wite dem, fur shu is a caalin.”

“Never you ant what he says,” said Betty.
“Alto da most o it is true anof.”

“It’s really in regard to that, in a way, that we have come over to see you, Mrs Laurenson,” said the Chairman. “You have displayed what I think is a most commendable spirit, you and your daughter, in trying to ameliorate your lot and brighten your lives in this quiet and somewhat out-of-the-way spot. At times one can easily conceive that life here must be somewhat dull. There is little change or variety, except, perhaps, in the matter of weather. To enliven dull moments and furnish a wholesome interest, Mary has purchased a piano, being very fond, I understand, like yourself, of music; and you have, properly, I think, purchased some articles of furniture of a superior kind. This is all evidence of a taste which should for every reason be encouraged. Now, I understand that a difficulty has arisen over the matter of finding accommodation for these things, which, we are told, are lying at Hillswick. Well, we have come to tell you that this problem has been tackled and solved, in the meantime, at any rate—”

“Yae, dat’s da warst o it. It’s only fur da meantime,” said Betty’s lord and master.

“We have induced your good man to send for a house,—one of these ready-made structures which can easily be put up, and it will be here, we hope, next week. One of our errands to-day is to see where this house can best be put, to fit in with your present house, so as to be handiest, and erected with the least trouble.”

“Thank you, sir. Ye’re aa awfil kind. I’m

been wirryin aboot dis furnatir an piano, I most say ; an its a lod aff o mi mind to tink its no gaen ta be ruined wi damp."

" Well, I think I see from the structure of this house, where it should be set, and I also think we'll better all go out and see how things look from the outside, and have a look at the site."

This matter in the Tittie's opinion, took up more time than it was worth, and getting impatient, she went up, first to the P. M., whom she "fixed" by the arm, and dragged away, and then Mr E., whom she annexed the same way, and gave utterance to her thoughts.

" Let the Chairman and Mr D. arrange about that stupid house. We are not going to waste more time over it. Come along. You were talking about the Grind of the Navir, and the Holes of Something, and the Cannon of Something else, and all the fine sights we were to see."

" Yiss, dats aa true anot. Bit heth, ye'll hae ta watch yoursell wi Mr E. He's no used wi dis weemen takin a howld o him, an he'll maybe rin aff wi you. He's lookin fur a wife, you know."

" I'll risk it, I think. Come you along and let us see these fine things. You men are so stupid, dense, so engrossed in your own affairs sometimes, that you forget that sweet creatures of girls are standing round waiting for you to look after them. But as for Mr E. here, I believe, he would make an excellent husband."

" Weel, as ta dat, dats wan o da things at ye can never tell intil ye try. Ye nicht mak a excellent wife. Its hard ta say ; ye never know."

“What’s your opinion, Mr E?” asked the Tittie, who was evidently out for fun.

“My dear young lady, I would never presume to venture an opinion on such a delicate matter.”

“Na, you’ll better aks him redder, what kind o a wife he tinks Meggie wid mak,” said the P. M.

“Maggie? Maggie is almost too good a girl for any man,” said the Tittie.

“I widna go dat lent. No, I widna go as far as dat. I dont tink at dir ony woman ever made ower guid fur a man.”

“Upon my word!”

“Dir micht be, an nae doot dir is, men ats ower guid for a woman, fur of coorse da Loard creaatid men first; an everybody kens at dir not a finer thing ipu da face o da eart as a well-set up man. Dats been known fae da time o Adam doon.”

“You’re wrong entirely. What did your favourite, Burns, say?”

‘His prentice hand he tried on man,
And then he made da lasses, O.’”

“I never wis sae boond ta Burns as ta believe everything he wrot. Na. We’ll lat da lasses come second, bit no farder. Dey needna try.”

“There’s one thing,” replied the Tittie, as the three sped down the green sward arm-in-arm towards the sea, “men may die for want of breath; and they may give up the ghost fighting with each other; but they will never die for lack of conceit of themselves.”

“What a glorious spot!” exclaimed Mr E.,

as the three now strengthened by some of the others, came in sight of a long stretch of green sward lying between them and the cliffs facing the western ocean.

"What a magnificent spectacle!" cried the Chairman. "Whoever would expect to find such a place as this so near the sea?"

"What's that over there?" asked the vice-Chairman of the P. M.

"Yon? Yon's da Grind o da Navir."

"For goodness sake let us hurry and see this wonderful sight."

"What a champion place for a golf course!" exclaimed Mr H., for whom magnificent rock scenery had few charms.

"Couldn't be beat in the United Kingdom," said Mr D.

"I say," said the Clerk, "we must camp out here for a week, and lay off a golf course. We can't miss this—not on any account. Who'll ask the super? I believe he would consent right enough. I'm not feeling in form for want of a regular game of golf. These protracted sittings, and writing, and tabulating figures, take it out of one, you know."

"I could easily approach the Chairman on the subject," said Mr C. "Let us go over and go into raptures over these rocks, and work him up into a frenzy of delight. Impress upon him the desirability of staying in the vicinity to acquire useful knowledge; and the thing is done."

"But we have no tents," said the high-heeler, "nor golf clubs, nor balls."

"There's no difficulty about that," said Mr

D. "We can wire off to Aberdeen immediately for the tents, and send a car to Lerwick for the clubs and all that's required. The course can be laid off until the tents arrive, and a few days' practice put in. Then when the car is in Lerwick, it could take up some provisions and other things necessary for camping out."

Elated at the prospect before them, the party set out to join those who were at the Grind of the Navir. Going up, they all duly joined in the rhapsodies of the Chairman, Mr E., the Tittie, and the vice-Chairman, who, with the P. M., were lost in wonder, and admiration, at the majestic, never-to-be forgotten sight.

"The stupendous power of the sea is truly appalling," said the Chairman. "See how these great rocks have been thrown as if they had been pebbles, quarried out of the solid cliff and thrown hundreds of feet, built one upon another almost like the walls of a house. The works of Nature are truly marvellous. What a place to be in! And this is not all, I am told, by any means."

"Aall! Aall! You're only begun ta get a peep o whats here aboot, I assure you. A mont widna du you. Ye wid need a hale simmer, an a motor boat, an a gude crew at kens da tides here aboot, ta shaw you aa its ta be seen. A week is nothin."

"Well, we will have to arrange to prolong our stay then. This is one of the opportunities which Mr E. can embrace, where his abilities come into play. Here is a chance for bringing in in the report an entrancing chapter. The romance of peats

has been spoken of. Here it is. Here are peats, here is grand scenery, beauty, romance, poetry, and everything the heart can wish. Pity is we could not make our abode here for some time."

"That same matter has been discussed," said the Clerk, "as we came along. From a health point of view we have thought that during these fine summer days and nights nothing could be better than for the whole party to camp out. Those who wished could play golf, and those who had a desire could explore the rocks, and admire the scenery. The tents and all required could be here in a few days."

"The suggestion is too good not to be acted upon. But the thing should be done thoroughly. A motor boat, as our Practical Friend suggests, should be got, as well as the tents and all the other things. I think that immediate steps should be taken to carry the plan into execution."

"Yiss, an of coorse aa dis 'ill come oot o what dey caa da Contingencies Fund—dat's fur extrees laek dis, I tak it. Dir nae use o haein a Fund aless ye mak some use o it."

"That's quite true," said the Chairman. "I think we'll all better go over to the hotel and consider carefully what we need, and then wire without further delay. What a place! No wonder Mr Laurenson said there was no place like it. From the health point of view, it is most important, as well as affording an opportunity of acquiring that knowledge of which we are in search."

CHAPTER LV.

The Commissioners make arrangements for a Camping-out Holiday.

Arrived back at the hotel, the Commission sat down seriously to consider what was to be done in view of the latest development. The universal opinion prevailed that it would be a great mistake to allow such a fine spell of weather to pass without getting the full benefit of it, at the same time to study natural history, add to their store of knowledge, and incidentally obtain a further insight into the Peat Industry.

“The first thing that should be done,” said Mr D., “is to wire to Aberdeen for three or four nice tents, with the necessary cooking appliances, bedding, and so on, to camp out in that glorious spot in comfort.”

“How does the actual work of the Commission stand?” said the Chairman. “What stage are we at? Have the proceedings of the meetings we have held been fully written out?”

“Everything is in order,” said the Clerk.

“Every jot and tittle of the evidence taken noted?”

“Every word; every syllable.”

“Have the statistics supplied been carefully and properly tabulated?”

“ Completely.”

“ And copies made?”

“ Yes.”

“ How many?”

“ Twelve. Two for the Secretary for Scotland; two for the Home Office; one for the Member of Parliament for the County; two for the County Council; one for the Town Council; the remaining four we keep.”

“ Has Mr E. made any progress with what I may call the literary report? the narrative of the proceedings of the Commission?”

“ I believe he has made a beginning. He has got two paragraphs of the Introduction done; and I know he has taken voluminous notes. But it is of course clearly impossible to write a complete narrative of our proceedings until these proceedings come to a close. He has already two notebooks filled with data regarding what you laid considerable emphasis upon at our preliminary meetings—the poetry and romance of peats.”

“ I am particularly glad to hear that, for I consider that this drab world could be made a great deal brighter by everyone laying more emphasis on, and paying more attention to, the poetry, and beauty, and romance that surrounds us on all sides. Well, gentlemen, I consider that we have considerable reason for congratulating ourselves on the progress already made. We have only been in active commission for a matter of three weeks or so, and during that time we have travelled I do not know how many miles. But that is a matter which our Clerk will learn from the chauffeurs, who all, I hope,

have speedometers on their motors. It is a very important matter indeed, that of mileage, and one upon which the Government rightly lay particular stress. In making up monthly reports, or records of work done, never neglect to begin by saying that "the Peat Commission, in its desire to make their investigations into the peat industry the more thorough and complete, have, during the first month of its activities, travelled 9500 miles," or whatever the actual distance may be. Figures like these instantly impress the public, and naturally and properly, the Government never fail to make use of this simple, but effective means of making an impression on the public mind. Well, we have travelled so many hundreds, perhaps thousands of miles, already; we have held two sittings; we have, after citing them, examined a number of witnesses; from these witnesses we have obtained a considerable amount of information; besides this, we have had personal experience of peat-cutting—we have ourselves actually engaged in the primary labour which goes to the making of peat as used for fuel. We have learned and seen how the people live, and under what conditions the peat industry is wrought. It cannot, therefore, be said, that any time has been wasted. In fact, for a Government Commission, I consider we have moved with an alacrity and energy which is sure to earn us the thanks of the House of Commons."

"Weel, if dey don't I know dir geen vots o tanks ta dem at deserved it far less as wiz," said Jerry.

"Taking all these things into consideration,

and seeing our work is well forward, I consider we are fully justified in seizing the opportunity which has presented itself at this romantic spot to put in what I may call our well-earned holiday—”

“Hear, hear—”

“Everyone is entitled to a holiday, even a Commission. This fact is being more widely recognised everywhere. But there is another aspect of the matter which has struck me, and which induces me to give my consent to the proposal. You will all likely have noticed that a strong movement is making itself felt to induce the Government to appoint a Ministry of Health. There is little doubt, in my view, that such a Ministry will be appointed. Now, gentlemen, what has struck me is this. Under such a Ministry—indeed under any Ministry—there are necessarily appointments, persons employed to see that the duties for which the Ministry was created are carried out. Now, more unlikely things have happened than that an appointment under this new Ministry may fall our way.”

“Whin we’re don wi da paets, ye mean,” asked the P. M.

“Not necessarily. The appointments could be concurrent, although it might be separate and distinct, for I do not think the Ministry of Health will be in actual commission until after the war.”

“But how could Peat experts be selected for appointments under a Ministry of Health?” asked Mr C.

“Faith, dir nothin more helty as paets,” put in the P. M. “Folk at wirks tree monts every year i da paets gets helt fur da rest o da year.”

—"Mr C., I'm afraid, fails to grasp what I may call the psychology of the official mind. The other day a school inspector was appointed to an important post demanding an extensive and accurate knowledge of agriculture. The connection between peats and health is certainly closer than between inspecting schools and farming. I look upon it in another light. By living in the open air, as we propose doing for a few weeks, we could be actual, living, practical examples of health—products of the free and open life. What more natural, then, if, when we were interviewing the Government, humbly presenting our first report, they would be so struck with our appearance that they would beg us to take appointments under the new Ministry."

"Yiss, an parteeklarly so whin dey funn at we wir doin dis job richt, you know. Dats da main thing. Do da wark richt, an dan ye'll be sure o gettin more o da sam kind, parteeklarly bi da Govermint. I'm towld at wan o da policies, as dey caa it, o dis Govermint, is 'Virtue Rewaarded.' An anidder is, 'No—no—no incom—'"

"Incompetents, perhaps, you mean," put in Mr C.

"Dats da wurd. Dey mean at non at doesna ken da wark thoroughly, you know, haes ony shance o gettin a job. I don know. Bit yon's what I'm towld."

"I think that's perfectly correct. Otherwise we would not have been here," said Mr D.

"Everything being so satisfactory, from every point of view, and prospects excellent," said the

Chairman, "we had better address ourselves to the work immediately in hand. The Clerk might call in the shorthand writers to take notes of our requirements for this camping out business."

"Widna ye aks in da leddies tu? Dey'll laekly need some things at we know nothin about."

"Certainly, certainly. We cannot move without the ladies."

"Well, now that we are all here, the first thing to see about is the tents."

"Weel, I suppose da lasses wid need wan ta demsells, ta start wi. A peerie, boanie een, ye ken, wi flooers aboot it, an a flag or twa, an half-adizzen o ribbons ta fleeter i da wind. We wid set dat een on da broo, kind o wye oot a da warst o da wind. Dat wye dey could hae a shance o lookin doon ipun wiz—aboot da only shance dey hae."

"Yes, and we look up to them, which of course we all do," said Mr E.

"Yae, yae; nae doot, nae doot," said Jerry, with a wink to the Tittie.

"Well, one tent for two, then."

"Na, I widna say fur twa. Dey'll no thank you fur wan at can only hould two. Dir sic a thing as da lads comin in fur a air o tae noo an again. No, no; I wid say ta hould fower, at ony rate."

"Well, then, one for four, and three for six each."

"That's enough for twenty-two," said the vice-Chairman, "and we are only about half that number."

"Yes, but, my dear sir, you forget that we may have to entertain a good deal. People will no

doubt visit us from all quarters, and we must have plenty of accommodation."

"Yiss, dat's true. Alwis hae plenty sufficient. Dats what I'm alwis said. Ye see, Betty and da bairns 'ill maybe come ower some nicht; an maybe, its hard ta say, maybe some o dis Coonty Cooncil, an maybe da Toon Cooncil 'ill come up alang—or we could rin doon fur dem—juist ta see hoo we're gettin on, ye ken. Its alwis better ta keep in wi da laek o dem. Dey micht be aksed whestins about what we wir doin. An of coorse if dey funn wiz aa anxeeous an aaber aboot da wark, an layin in a dose o helt at da sam time, dey wid pit in a most splendid report, an maybe help wiz wi dis Minister o Helt affair. I wid lay every oar i da watter, I assure you. If we'd no dune dat comin fae da haaf mony a time, we'd never gotten ta laand at aall."

"Well, then," continued the Chairman, "the tents are decided upon. The next thing is the furnishing of them. That's a very important point."

"Dir nae doot about dat. Bit dat's wan o da things at weemen can du better as men. Fur my pairt, I wid send da twa young leddies ta da toon an gie dem a free haand ta buy what wis needid. You know, dir nothin at dis weemen laeks better as dat. Gie dem plenty o money, an plenty o shops, an, Loard save me, as I believe at some o dem widna care if dey never saw a man more."

"You are too hard on the ladies," said Mr E. "I hardly think they would ever reach that stage."

"Ye tink dat noo; bit wait ye you. Dir no don wi you yet. Dir no begun."

“ At any rate,” said the Chairman, “ We know that in these matters the ladies have much more sense than men, and, when they like, can make a pound go farther than a mere man can make three. Our Practical Friend’s suggestion, is, as usual, good; and I think I could do nothing better than to give the ladies half-a-dozen blank cheques, which I will sign, and send them on their mission with as little delay as possible. That is to say, if they would care to go.”

“ Go! Go! I know nothing at dey wid go readier fur as dat. What tink you, my jewel?”

“ Oh, we always like to do our duty, even when it comes to the length of looking after the comfort of a dozen helpless men, and that’s no small undertaking,” said the Tittie, who, as well as the high-heeler, was, it was quite clear, delighted at the prospect before them.

“ Dir wan thing ye’re not ta du, mind. Ye’re not ta go an waste money on a lot o flummery, — fal-de-rals, an ribbons, an flooers, an—an—pictirs; ye’ll be comin wi pictirs, I widna winder. Its harly safe ta laeve dis weemen alon. Dir no sae bad as lang as dey hae a man ta look efter dem; bit I’m not very sure aboot laevin dem aatagedder ta demsells. Its harly safe. Ye don’t know what dey’ll come wi. Heth, dey’ll maybe bring a piana amung aa da rest.”

“ Well, I think, if we have to camp out for two or three weeks, that a piano is absolutely essential,” said Mr D.

“ And a good gramophone,” put in Mr G.

“ An maybe a organ fur Sundays, ye’ll be

wantin next. An a fiddle fur Seterdays."

"And a flute for Fridays."

"And a cornet for Wednesdays."

"Na, na; juist be moadrat. As Paal said, Lat your moaderation be known unto aall men. We're aa moaderat folk, nedder spending ower muckle o wir nown money, or time, bit doin da wark in a richt an raesonable wye. So, da lent o a piana I wid go, bit no farder. Fur of coorse dir more things ta come oot o da Extree Fund as dis afore we're don, an we maun laeve twartree hunder fur dat, yet ken."

"The ladies, I admit," said Mr D., "can purchase the requisites to make us all comfortable in the tents. But there's one thing they can't do. They can't be left to purchase golf clubs and balls, and flags, fishing tackle, of all kinds, shot guns and shot, and things of that nature. These are all much too important for them to look after."

"Nae doot dat's true. Weemen is juist richt up til a certain point. Dat's what I'm alwis said. Dey canna be expeckid ta ken aa men's rewhirements. Bit dis is juist da very thing dir been lookin fur. Pit Mr H. and Mr J. alang wi dem ta buy yon golf things. Gie dem tree motors—wan fur every twa folk, and wan ta tak da things up. Dat'll mean more mileage, ye know. Dat's very important. Dat'll add comin on ta tree hunder miles, forby ony peerie bits of extree runs dey may hae i da toon, or aboot da toon. Ye can aesy say anidder six hunder mile. Heth, da Govermint most think at were doin weel. Da only faer at I hae

about dis fower gaen bi demsells is at da lasses 'ill laekly faa oot about da men."

"We'll have to take that risk," said the Chairman. "If they do, it will be nothing new in the history of the world; but I have no doubt they will all come back with whole bones. These things having been settled, another important matter yet remains to be decided. That is, the question of a motor boat, or a drifter, or a yacht. We must have one or the other at our absolute disposal for at least three weeks."

"I ddn't know about dis motor boats. I don't care fur dem. A good weel-funn drifter is no sae bad. Bit motor boats is ower peerie."

"What about a yacht?" asked Mr C.

"I have no doubt that if I represent our case to the proper quarter, a good yacht would be placed at our disposal. The Government is always most willing, and invariably show their desire to assist in any work of national importance, by placing their unlimited resources at the disposal of public officials. I must say I have a leaning to a well-equipped yacht. In such a vessel one gets the amenities of a good hotel, while enjoying the manifold beauties of the sea and magnificent rock scenery. In a large vessel the discomforts often associated with the sea are largely minimised. I think I will therefore put myself in touch with the authorities at the earliest possible moment."

"Yiss, I think you're richt. We hae ta geng ta Papa, ye see, an Foola, forby idder places at ye canna get at bi laand; an haein a rael guid yaacht about, fur a fine day noo an dan whin da

sea is whiet, wid be haandy—very haandy. Ye see I promised da young leddies here at dey sood see Foo-la, so ta Foo-la we must go. Its in Foo-la I hae ta get the rare birds' fedders fur da young leddies, ye see; so, as I say, ta Foo-la we'll hae ta go. An dan Papa, ye know; Papa."

"Are there peats in Papa? Can we get further insight into the Peat Industry in Papa?"

"No, du ye know dir no paets in Papa. Bit dir plenty o caves."

"Yes, I've heard of famous caves there," said Mr C., "which I would much like to see."

"Caves! Dir not da laek o dem ta be seen i da Breetish Isles, I assure you. Not dat I'm been in every cave in Breetan; bit I'm been towld so bi dem ats been. Dirs Frankie's Cave,—Hol, dey caa dem, bit dir big hols, I most say—an Christie's Cave, dan da caves in Brei Gio—an,—an, I canna mind da name o da whole o dem. An as fur stacks an skerries, Loard bliss you, as dir bi da hunder. Oh, Papa is a graand place. Da warst is gettin til it, an dats why we need a yaacht, fur dir a aafil tide dere, an it needs men at knows aa da rocks ta tak ye across."

"And suppose we are all drowned in getting across?" asked the Tittie. "What then?"

"Weel, my jewel, if its da Loard's will at ye hae ta be droondid, droondid ye'll hae ta be. Dey say—alto I dont know hoo dey ken—at its a very pleasant kind o wye o deein. Bit never ye tink aboot dat. Dir nae faer o you droondin. Ye'll dee i your bed aboot ninety year aald. Ye wid mak a boany owld wife, I believe, do ye know, wi'

a white mutch an specs., readin da Bible an knittin your stockin."

"Well, I think arrangements have now been pretty well made. What we have to do now is to see them put into execution with as little delay as possible. We have decided on the tents and their furnishings, on the golf requisites, on a piano, on a yacht. With regard to provisions I think we will be all right. Hitherto we have lacked for nothing, and I think that matters can be arranged so that that satisfactory state of affairs may continue. The best that each can do now is to address himself or herself to the work immediately before them, so that no time may be lost. This fine weather may not continue; therefore 'enjoy the day while yet ye may.'"

"And will you really go to Foula and get these feathers for us," asked the Tittie of the P. M.

"Weel, if I canna go to Foola in a yaacht on a fine day efter goin a dizzen o times in a fowerern in a gale, I widna be muckle wirt. My jewel at ye ir, I wid go to Foola in a ould, laeky whillie ta get da fedders I promised, far less a yaacht. Bit ye'll come tu, don't you see, an maybe see me i da face o da rocks gettin da birds. Ye'll see your your owld Jirry danglin, hingin, swingin, atween heeven an ert i da very face o da Kaim o Foola yet. An dat 'ill be a sicht fur you. Bit ye sall get da fedders."

CHAPTER LVI.

Further arrangements are made for camping out; and the P. M. has a talk with the Tittie about Mr E.

“ There’s one thing we will not have to forget, by the way,” said Mr D.

“ What’s that?”

“ A lawn mower. Unless we have greens in perfect order, we cannot play good golf.”

“ That’s true,” said Mr C. “ A lawn mower is essential; and the necessary implement for making the holes the proper size, and the flags and numbers. An eighteen hole course, I presume, will be laid out?”

“ Certainly.”

“ Whar ir ye gaen ta lay oot dis coorse, as ye caa it?”

“ There behind the Grind of the Navir. That long stretch of green called the Villyins of Ure on the map. What precisely is the meaning of this word? It has no connection with villians, I hope?”

“ No, no, dat it doesna. Dir nae villans o dat kind in Shetland. Dir plenty oot o it, bit dir non in it. I’m sure I couldna tell you what da meanin o da wurd is. We juist aye caa it da Villyins.”

“ I was struck with the word myself,” said Mr E., “ and have been looking the matter up.

Villyins means a place where men used to play football."

"Dey couldna gotten a better place. Dir plenty o room, an dir no baess or weemen about; so dey could play da baa in paece an whietness. So yon's da meanin o it, is it? Weel, weel, live an learn dey say."

"That makes the playing of golf very appropriate. We can imagine the old fellows, perhaps three or five hundred years ago, after their day's labour, taking their recreation at this glorious spot, enjoying the sport, and unconsciously feeling the charm of their surroundings. We moderns, after our labour, take our sport in the same place in a different way. And so the world goes on. We are simply continuing an ancient custom. The only objection I have to the place as a golf course is that there are few hazards, or bunkers."

"That can easily be put right," said Mr C. "We can include in our order some spades, to dig trenches with; and until the articles arrive, the whole Commission could pleasantly fill up a few hours every day gathering stones to make a few bunkers. After the orders have been sent off, I suggest that a few of us should go to the place, and in the meantime lay off the course. That is a very important matter."

"Yiss, I suppose it is. An dunna ye gie different names ta aa da hols?"

"That's frequently done, in addition to their being numbered."

"Dir nae want o names. Ye could caa dem

da Navir, an da Scraada, an da Dore Holm, an—."

"And The Drongs."

"Yiss, an Roenis Hill, an Da Snjoog, an da Kaim. Ye'll no want fur names. Heth, da weemen 'ill maybe be tinkin at some o da hols sood be caa'd efter dem. Dey aye laek a cristenin, dis weemen, even mair as a weddin."

"Yes, I should say so. I certainly think that some of the holes should be called after us," said the Tittie. "Who or what better could you name them after?"

"Weel, dat juist aa depends hoo ye look at it or wha looks at it. We could aye caa wan Da Tittie, at ony rate."

"And one Betty."

"And Mary."

"And Maggie."

"Oh, yiss, yiss; we most hae wan fur Meggie. Wan o da best eens, tu. Dir no mony weemen laek Meggie, I assure you. Shu can cook a fattie—"

"Oh, we're tired of hearing what Maggie can do," said the Tittie. "You have a profound admiration for Maggie simply because she can cook. It's been well said with regard to man—'Feed him well, and that's all he wants.'"

"Weel, aless ye feed him, ye canna hae him, dats wan thing, sure. An whaar wid ye be dan? An what tink ye o wan fur Madam?"

"Oh, yes, it could never do to leave her out. What would you call it?"

"Weel, I wid caa it da high-heeler."

"No, no; that would never do."

"Weel, dan, I wid caa it Hoolin Skarpa."

"What's the meaning of that?"

"It means somethin high, you know; somethin kind o sharp. Very good name, too; very expressive."

"And are none to be named after the men?"

"Oh, yae, we'll shurly hae ta du dat too."

"Oh, yes, we must call some by the old Norse names. There's Torf-Einar, the man who discovered how to use peat for fuel. Nothing could be more appropriate. That will do for you to begin with, and Thorfinn, and Erlend, and Brusi, and goodness knows how many more old sinners and robbers and murderers. You are descended from a fine set up here, you are, from all accounts."

"We're no waar as dem farder sooth. Wir folk juist guid strechter ta da point, dats aa. If dey didna agree, dey juist took aff een anidder's heads, and dey wir nae mair aboot it i da meantime, till some idder body startid again. Na, na, da best o da whole o you i da sooth is come fae da north, I assure you. Da farder nort ye get da better; da farder sooth da waar."

"Well, I think we'll better go and get all these orders attended to. We must wire for most of the things; otherwise precious time, and more important still, the fine weather, will be lost. Madam and I are going in for golf as well as the rest of you. We're not going to let the men keep all the best things in this world to themselves, I can tell you."

"Weel, as far as I'm seen, some o dis weemen

at tries ta play golf maks a puir job o it. Bit nae doot dey du dir best."

* * * * *

"I'm juist come fae seein Meggie," said the P. M. to his confidante, the Tittie, after tea.

"Yes, and how is Miss Margaret?"

"Oh, Meggie is ower weel; ower weel; bit —bit, do you know dir somethin different aboot her."

"In what way? What's wrong with her?"

"I'm no sayin dir onything wrang wi her; bit shu's not da sam. Ye wid—ye wid tink—tink, you know, at dir somethin on her mind. Shu doesna spaek muckle."

"Dear me. Well, but Maggie was never very talkative."

"No, shu's not laek da most o da weemen. at hae ta spaek or dan dey wid die. I'm not aff o da opeenion, do ye know, at da barm is wirkin."

"The barm is working? Whatever do you mean?"

"Weel, barm, you know, is what do folk wis wint ta use ta mak da bread rise. Da sam as yeast, you know, ta pit life intil it."

"What's that got to do with Maggie? Isn't Maggie alive?"

"Yiss, shu's alive; bit canna a person spaek in parables, as ye wid say?"

"A person may speak in parables, certainly; but persons should consider whether other persons can understand the parables."

“ Weel, I’m not responsible, as da man said, fur persons haein nae understandin. If folk haes nae wit dey needna blame me fur it. Bit seein you canna mak oot da parable, as ye may caa it, I mean ta say in plain language at I’m no aff o da opeenion at Meggie is set her mind i da wye at we wir spaek-in aboot, an shu’s gettin a notion o Mr E. Da barm is wirkin, I’m tellin you.”

“ Well, it is possible that Maggie’s affections may veer round in the direction of Mr E. But Maggie will think well about it, I think. She is not one who will take a violent and sudden fancy to any man.”

“ No, shu’s not; bit shu’s wan o da kind at wance shu grips shu howlds, you see. Heth, do you know, I never saw Meggie lookin better. Shu’s gotten on a black bloose, wi a white collar, an peerie collars at da fit o every wan o da sleeves; an a brooch, you know, a brooch; an her hair laid doon as flat as a pancake. I made oot, bi my wye o it, at shu wis expecin Mr E. ta come alang.”

“ And did you see any signs of the ardent lover?”

“ No, I did not. I dont know what ta mak o dat man. Dis leetrey men is peculiar, you know, dir precaarious. Wan time dir upliftid, nixt time ye canna get a wird oot o dem. Noo, it widna surprise me at aall at Mr E. haes forgotten at sic a person as Meggie is aboon da ert. Maybe he’s stoorin an stymin inta some ould books, tryin ta fin da meanin o some wird or why a place wis caad so-an-so. Noo, don’t you see, dat sort o thing canna do fur coortin. A lass is no ta be coortid

wi haein da meanin o wirds explained till her, an bein towld at da Persians or da Egyptians, or even da Norsemen came here an guid dere. Shu wants somethin mair warmly as dat, I assure you."

"You seem to know all about it."

"Faith, I didna fix ipun Betty fur dat sixth een ithoot kennin somethin aboot it."

"And what was your mode of procedure, may I ask?"

"Weel, of coorse, I canna tell you aa da par-teeklars; bit dir wis juist wan thing at I may say dey aa laekid, an dat wis, ta tak dem aboot da neck, you know, and maybe efter a while ta set her ipu your knee."

"Get out! That's only your style of court-ing."

"Weel, its da style at Adam started wi, as far as I can mak oot, an its no aatagedder oot o fashion yet. Noo, if I could even see da man launchin oot into poetry, I wid be more aesy i mi mind. Fur dats wan sign at shaws a man is pretty far gon."

"But perhaps Mr E., being rather scientific-ly inclined, could not write poetry."

"Weel, he could aye try. Mony a een is tried ta write poetry at hed nae caal til it. Da warst is wi dis leetry men, whin dey du try ta pit dcon somethin aboot dir lasses, in da poetry wye, at dey caa dem nymphs, an Chlorises, an fairies, an shepherdesses, an Loard knows what. Dan dey say dir laek da moon, or da stars, or flooers, or birds—everything accept demsells. Ye never hear dem sayin muckle aboot da sun, though. Dey shurly keep him fur demsells. Shepherdess!

Faith, I know at da only thing at Meggie kens about being a shepherdess wis whin shu wis caain da sheep i da hill. Ye need ta be a shepherdess dan, I can tell you. Ye hae ta spank along ower hill an dale, burn an daek, an run an pant an swaet an toil, an maybe every noo an agen go heady-craw in a dibe. An shu could do it too, I can tell you. Accep Betty, I'm not seen a woman i da hill at could spang along better as Meggie. Dat's da shepherdessin at Meggie kens about. An nae doot, hoo ta tak da sheep's oo an mak fine hosiery oot o it. Bit even if he wid go da lent o caain Meggie a shepherdess, or even a star, I widna care, fur I most hae him an Meggie mairied."

"Yes, you are very anxious about that. You are not so anxious to see me married."

"Weel, ye see, ye're wan o da kind at haes a guid shance o gettin a man—alto, I widna say. Dont ye be ower sure. Dir mony a slip atween da cup an da lip. Men is precious, you know, an dir no ower mony o dem."

"Poof! For you men!"

"You can poof, an you can whoof, my dear, as lang as you're young. Bit hoo wid ye laek ta be fifty ithoot a man or onything else? Tell me dat?"

"I'm not called upon to tell you anything."

"Na, sometimes its best ta say nothing in dis world. Meggie, don't you see, is come til a time o life whin shu wid need ta be settled. I wid laek ta see her on da stocks, as ye wid say. Dis man is ower muckle laek da nor-wast wind — he's too pirrie."

“Pirrie? Whatever do you mean?”

“Don’t you understand at da nor-wast wind comes in pirrs, you know—wan time strong an da next time nearly away. It’s not steady, don’t you see; not steady. Dat doesna du wi coortin, you know. Wan thing I faun oot wi da baand at I guid wi, wis at dey aa leaked da coortin ta be steady,—steady, you know, as lang as it laestid, more laek da aest wind. Noo, dis man comes an goes in pirrs. Wan time he’s blowin hard; next time he’s a black calm. Noo, Meggie canna pit up wi da laek o dat. Faith, I widna winder at he wid come inta da kitchen an tell her he’s funn oot at ‘stoor’ means big, or somethin da laek o dat. What under Heeven’s name is shu carin whedder ‘stoor’ is big or peerie, or whedder ta ‘glaan’ is ta sharpen or ta blunten. Shu wid tink it mair sense fur him ta sharpen up an get some oardinir midder wit.”

“How would it do for you to have a talk with him, and give him some of your own experiences with the ladies, and incidentally drop a hint or two about Maggie?”

“I don know. Its kind a awkward ta tell a man hoo ta coort. Dat sood be nateril, an soodna need ony tellin. Heth, here he comes, wi a book in his haand. Let me see what we can do.”

“Mr Laurensen, you are the very person I wish to see. I have been worrying over a word I heard the other day, and I wish to know if you can explain its meaning.”

“Weel, we sall try. Is it a Shetland wurd?”

“Yes, I think so. It was something like

“haltagongi,” or ‘altagongi.’ What does it mean?”

“Oh, ‘altagongi?’ Och, dats da wird at da ould men said at da haaf whin a big turbot wis laek ta set aff wi da line. I’m tould dey spak ta da fish i da ould Norse language caas da English tongue didna hae ony effect ipu da fish. Yon wird means, ‘stop rinnin.’”

“I see. Dear me. How very interesting.”

“Dan dey couldna spaek aboot da wife as da wife, no, no.”

“Dear me! Why not?”

“Oh, becaas dey never used da English wirds at da haaf, you know. Da wife gude bi da name o da ‘haimelt.’”

“‘Haimelt.’ That’s a very peculiar word.”

“Yiss. Maybe. I’m been towld bi dem at kens, at ‘haimelt’ means da wan at steys at hom—da wife, you know, alto, noo-a-days, dir some o dem at does everything bit bide at home.”

“This is really most interesting. Were these names applied to domestic animals?”

“Oh, yiss, yiss. Da coo wis caad da ‘boorik,’ an da cat da ‘foodin.’ I don know if dey went da lent o hens. Bit what I wid advise you ta do, is ta go an aks Meggie aboot da hens. Shu kens aboot hens well, an nae doot shu’ll be heard if da owld fishermen hed ony perteeklar name fur dem.”

“That’s an excellent idea. No doubt Miss Maggie, who is a very intelligent girl, will be able to throw some light on the subject.”

“Faith, I doot it ’ill tak her aa her time ta throw muckle light into you. I towld you dat. Da man is entirely off again. His mind is gon on da idder teck aatagedder. Heth, do you know, its my opinion, at Meggie ill hae ta pop da whestin hersell. Da man is daamished fur maist pairt.”

“The matter may be arranged otherwise than that. But I do believe that Maggie would make a good wife, the very kind he needs,—one who would shake him up, and make him a little more practical. It all depends upon Maggie’s tact.”

“Weel, couldna you hae a wurd wi Meggie? Dir many wyas o killin a cat, you know.”

“Yes, there is. And what a woman can’t do, a man need not even attempt. They are a blundering lot, in many ways.”

“Maybe. So, we’ll see da moarn, if onything comes o da talk aboot da hens.”

CHAPTER LVII.

The yacht arrives; so also does Laura.

“Heth, dir not been lang in sendin da yacht,” remarked the P. M. at the breakfast table a few days after the events narrated in the last chapter. “A fine lookin thing shu is too. Not ower big, an not too peerie; juist haandy fur goin aboot da voes an da coast here.”

“No,” said the Chairman, “they have not. The yacht is here before all the other paraphernalia. I fully expected the Government would make every effort to meet our wishes. That’s one of the strongest points of our Government. They never fail to lend a sympathetic ear to the requests of those who serve them, and are always most willing and anxious to put at their disposal the nation’s practically unlimited resources. And should it happen that the granting of these requests can in any way conduce to the comfort and well-being of their servants; if their health can be benefited, or their pleasure in life increased, then the Government are all the more willing to consider them. These are the reasons why the yacht is here so soon; a day or two after the receipt of my letter.”

“Weel, it juist shaws dir soond sense. Dey know at nobody can do dis wark sae weel, an sae

whick, as wiz; an dey know at folk at wirks hard most hae a holiday."

"From the letter just put into my hands, I see that the yacht is at our absolute disposal for three weeks precisely. No more."

"Oh, dat 'ill do no sae bad. We can see a lock in tree weeks."

"She looks a little darling," said the Tittie, who had gone to the window and was gazing in admiration at the graceful lines of the handsome yacht as she lay in the offing, the high-heeler at the same time examining the vessel through a pair of binoculars. "I wonder how many officers are on board?"

"Dere you ir again. Tinkin mair aboot da men as da sailin aboot an da scenery."

"I see five men, four of them young, in uniform," said the high-heeler.

"Yae, yae, da bress buttons, da bress buttons. Oh, yiss, yiss. Oh, dis weemen. Gie dem some-thin bricht ta look at, an dey juist jimp at it. Noo, dir wan thing I'm going ta tell you,—if you're tinkin o carryin on onything i da wye o what dey caa a flirtation wi ony o dis officers, I'll not lat you come aboard."

"Pon my word! You'll not let me come on board! I like that. And why should I be deprived of a little innocent enjoyment more than any other person, I should like to know?"

"Becaas I don't think at flirtation is innocent enjoyment, as ye caa it. I'm been watchin you. I'm been lookin efter you. I don't tink at you're i da best o müdes wi you nown chap, mi leddy; an

in dat state o mind, hermlless flirtation micht be very hermtil. You're got ta stick ta da wan, my jewel, an no geng fleeterin aboot laek a honey bee."

"My chap! Poof! I can tell you I have been thinking that my chap, as you call him, has been thinking far more of golf than of me lately. Ever since this idiotic golf course idea was started, he and the rest have talked of nothing else but tees, and bunkers, and hazards, and the best kind of clubs, and balls; drives, and putts, and approaches, and all the rest of it. Yes, and more than that, when they weren't talking about it, they were away laying off the course. For the attention we've got from any of them, one would think that so far as they were concerned, there wasn't a girl in the place. Chaps! Fine chaps they are! We'll show them! Then I suppose you think a man can go flirting about as much as he likes, but a woman can't. You were a great boy in your day, so far as we can hear."

"Oh, weel, you see, men is different. Dey hae ta wale, an pick, ye ken, afore dey gēt suited; an a woman, of coorse, is blied if ony man's choice faas ipun her."

"Men and their impudence! I'll show them. I'm very glad indeed that this yacht has come. We will have a few weeks at least of the company of some gentlemen, men who realise and appreciate the privilege of basking in a woman's smiles."

"Nae doot. Ye'll hae dem fur tree weeks, an whaar 'ill ye be whin dir gon? Dat's da point, my jewel."

"Well, we'll have had the pleasure of meeting

them, and talking about something else than golf, at any rate. It will be a change; that will be something to be thankful for."

"Yae, yae; changes is lichtsome, an we ken wha delights in dem. Bit I wis hearin whietly at dir more as men aboard da yacht. Dey say dir tree very boanie young leddies."

"Well, what of that?"

"Weel, its juist dis, you see. If you can go flirtin an carryin on wi da officers, dir nothin ta pirvent your chap haein a bit o innocent enjoyment wi da young leddies."

"He'd better dare! I'd like to see him try it! Oh, no; I mean to punish him, certainly, and punish him I will. But I'll let him see exactly what length of rope I'll give him. If he begins with any nonsense with any of these three 'very boanie young leddies,' as you call them—I don't believe they're pretty one bit—he'll have to reckon with me pretty quickly."

"Do you know you're no sae boanie whin you're tirn as whin you're blied. You're mair laek da high-heeler whin you get yon snurl in your broo. So, so. You tink what's sauce fur da goose is no sauce fur da gander. I dunna ken aboot that, though. Ye see dis gander fok, I mean dis men, haes to be fished fur an daelt wi very carefully. It taks a pooer o tac or vynd, ta hook an laand him safe oot o da water. So I wid advise you no ta get ower whick ipun your high horse. You might loss him aatagedder, you know."

"Whoof! There's as many fish in the sea as ever came out of it."

“ Maybe dey ir. Bit a bird i da haand is better as nine i da bush. Heth, dere’s Lowra Maikomson! What ill trift is sent her here dis day? Da best at we can do, I assure you, my jewel, is ta go doon an get aff ta da yacht as fast as we can. I’m not wantin ta meet Lowra dis day. Dere’s a boat comin ashore fur wiz. Go you an pit on yon boanie peerie pink hat, you know, an da blue bloose, an da yellow frock—yon rigoot at sets you sae weel, ye ken. I want ta see da Tittie lookin rael weel afore aa dis strange officers. Heth, ye’ll ding some o dem in bruck yet. An wait you, tell da high-heeler ta pit on a kind o a pleasant smile an no be sae stiff. Loard save me, as shu’s anof ta frichten a man, whin shu pits on da style, an da high English. An wait you a meenit; couldna you pit on yon peerie boa, an da muff, an da—”

“ Perhaps an oil-skin, and a sou’-wester, and sea-boots?”

“ Weel, weel, ony wye ye laek; bit try an look slippy.”

* * * * *

“ Oh, guid day, Mester. I’m awfil blied ta see you lookin sae weel—awfil blied.”

“ Is this you, Mrs Malcolmson? You’ll excuse me, I hope. I did not at the moment recognise you. You see, those like us who are engaged in onerous national work, which makes such tremendous demands on both mind and body, and who are meeting with large numbers of strange faces

every day in the course of our investigations, are really not able to place everyone on the instant. And how is your worthy husband? How is Mr Malcolmson? I hope he is keeping quite well?"

"Thank you, sir, thank you; he's very weel even noo. He's no been troubled wi da rheumatics dis while, an he's in winderfil helt, tank Guid."

"That's very satisfactory. And I hope you and the children are in an equally satisfactory state?"

"Yae, we canna complain. Da youngest boy is no been very weel efter da influenza; bit he's getting ower it. We're been readin, sir, aa about dis Commission, an I wis been noticin at you wir haein a aafil lock ta look efter. It most be very trying wark, an nae doot ye wid need mair help. I wis juist been winderin if ye toucht at dir ony openin fur Erty yet. Erty knows about paets. Oh, yiss, yiss, dat does he; fur mony is da varg he hed i dem."

"To tell you the truth, Mrs Malcolmson, after the heavy strain of work we have had, we have decided, purely in the interests of health, and to keep fit for the strenuous labours yet before us, to take a holiday as long as this fine weather lasts. We have decided to banish from our thoughts everything relating to peats for the matter of three weeks or a month. You see that yacht there?"

"Yae, I see her richt anof."

"That fine vessel has been placed at our disposal for three weeks by the Government, to take us round the coasts here, or wherever we wish to go; to visit places of interest about the islands, and

enable us the better to breathe the life-giving ozone of this glorious place — glorious, I mean, in fine weather. Then, in addition to that, we are laying out a golf course on the Villeins of Ure, where, in sight of the Grind of the Navir, Foula, the Dore Holm, the Muckle Ossa, and all the rest of the magnificent scenery in this most entrancing place, we can indulge in that health-giving sport called golf. In fact, so much are the members of the Commission impressed by the beauties and romantic interest of the district, that they have decided to camp out on the Villeins."

"Dear-a-dear! You dunna mean ta tell me, sir, at da Commission, an da young leddies is gaen ta lie oot day an nicht laek da animals o da field?"

"We are certainly not going under an ordinary roof, but we will be under shelter for all that. We are getting a number of first-class tents, with everything necessary for our comfort—cooking utensils included."

"An what if it comes a doonpoor o rain? Will dey keep oot da weet?"

"Oh, yes; they are rain-proof."

"Dear wan! Fur sic a hearin! Dan I suppose dev'll be nae openin fur Erty at dis time?"

"I'm afraid not. After the holiday there might be a chance, for I was thinking of holding a couple of sittings at North Roe; and to Yell we must go, for Yell, I understand, is almost all peat. Then we will probably call along Walls. In the meantime, however, we have to see the caves of Papa Stour, visit Foula, and the Heads of Grochen; study bird-life; spend some time fishing and shoot-

ing; and of course exercise ourselves with golfing. During this time Mr Laurensen will be engaged to some extent on a matter of considerable importance to himself and his family, for — But perhaps you don't know?"

"What, sir?"

"That Miss Mary has bought a piano, and Mrs Laurensen a considerable quantity of beautiful furniture for which a house of a temporary nature — an iron house, in face — has been ordered, and which we expect here any day now. The piano and furniture are here; and of course when the structure arrives, Mr Laurensen must attend to its erection to save the furniture. I understand that plans are being prepared of a nice modern cottage which Mr Laurensen intends to erect. His present house his family find too small, and it does not contain those conveniences which Mrs Laurensen considers desirable, and, indeed, necessary. No one understands better than you, Mrs Malcolmson, that what did for our grandfathers and grandmothers cannot do for us."

"Nae doot dat's true, sir, alto dir locks o folk at hae ta pit up wi what dir forbears wis used wi."

"Quite so. But the whole spirit of the age, you see, my dear Mrs Malcolmson, tends towards development—expansion; harder, more scientific work, and intellectual and physical development. I quite understand, and fully appreciate, Mr and Mrs Laurensen's point of view. They have no wish to leave the old place; the spot where they were born and brought up, where their family have been reared from infancy to manhood and woman-

hood. At the same time they wish to have a tidy little villa to end their days in in peace and comfort; and seeing that Mr Laurenson has the means, he is perfectly right in using it in such a sensible way. But I'm afraid I must leave you, Mrs Malcolmson. The captain of the yacht has sent a boat ashore for us, and the other members of the Commission are already on the way down. I must hurry away. Good-bye. I will assuredly keep Mr Malcolmson in mind."

As Lowra stood watching the members of the Commission wending their way to the beach, bitter thoughts filled her mind,

"Da laek o dat! Oh, dear-a-dear. Dat I sood stand here dis day an see Jerry Laurenson gallivantin an howldin up his great big ugly head among da gentry, an spaekin ta dem da sam as wan o demsells! An Erty Maikomson, as gude as him, as gude, poof! far better, yiss far better every wye, lyin hom vargin aboot a croft. Peugh! Wheugh! It maks me nearly seek. An dats goin ta build a hoose noo, nae less. No, no, its not a hoose; its a cottage; no, its not a cottage, its a villa. A villa, my dear at you ir! What is dis world comin til? An dan Betty! What tink you o Betty? What tink you o da laek o wiz now, wi wir pianas, an wir schiffoniers, and wir sattees, an wir shina? Loard help dat! No, no; its come til a time o day. An me, Lowra Maikomson, staandin here; me, da midder o seeven, yiss, seeven as boanie bairns as any woman could wish ta hev; me, wi nothin afore me bit ta go hom ta flit kye, an maet hens, an kerry muck, an dell an slave, an toil til me rig is bent oot

o shape. Yiss, an kerry on til I'm edder i da grave or i da Poorhoose. An Betty—I beg your pardon, Mrs Laurenson—sittin i da hom ats not good anof fur her now,—no, no—windering what shu'll do wi dis, an whaar shu'll set da next thing; an planin what room da piana 'ill go in, an what een da chiffonier, an whaar da sattee 'ill go. An whaar shu'll pit da rack—rack, what am I spaekin aboot? A rack 'ill not du Mrs Laurenson now. No, no. Shu'll hev da shina stowed away in a proper place fur it, ye know. An dan we'll hev wir keechan range, an laekly wir hot an cowld water, an wir bell, an wir mats at aa da doors. An with it aall, nothin bit a stink an a pride fit ta knock you down! Da wife o wan o His Majesty's Commissioners, you know. Weel heth, dir wan thing. If yon Chairman doesna gie Erty a place afore da thing is don, it 'ill no be my blame. Fur I know dis. I can cut as good a shine as Betty Laurenson ony day, I know dat. Aa I want is da money ta du it wi. An da money I'll hev, or my name is not Lowra. An dey say dir pitten dis Commission oot in a book, wi Jirry Laurenson stickin ipu da brods o her. Heth, its a winder dey didna hae Betty ipu da back o her. If dey pit oot anidder een, heth, I'll see at Erty is erekid ipu da brods o her. I'll see ta dat."

In this frame of mind Lowra betook herself home, where on her arrival she found Erty peaceably sitting at the side of a rig holding on to a cow's tether, and smoking his pipe. The cow, and the pipe, and not the least Erty's placidity only

added fuel to Lowra's wrath, as he learned before the night was over.

* * * * *

"Allow me to introduce the members of His Majesty's Peat Commission to yourself and your gallant officers," said the Chairman to the Captain of the yacht, a smart, middle-aged man, who along with his officers, were standing at the gangway to receive the party with all honours.

The officers, five in number, were of the usual ranks down to Sub-Lieutenant, and were accompanied by three stylishly-dressed young ladies. As the various introductions were made, one young man, the P. M. could see, fell in love with the Tittie at first sight, and another seemed considerably impressed by the style of the high-heeler. On the other hand, it was quite evident that Mr I. and Mr D. were smitten with the charms of two of the ladies, to one of whom, a very handsome girl, quite at her ease, and with rather a bored look on her face, the Tittie at once took a violent dislike.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A Question of Dinners.

The business of inspecting the yacht took some time. As the P. M. had remarked, the vessel "wisna ower big, an no ower peerie, juist a fine size," and even he had to admit that the style in which she was fitted up gave evidence of the very best taste, the highest workmanship, and a purse that had no bottom.

"I can't see meself hoo ony person can be seek ipu da laek o dis," he remarked. "Man, it's more laek wan o what dey caa dis draain rooms as onything else. Every contrivance under da sun at ever cam into da head o man is surely here ta mak folk comfortable. Yiss, even ta da piana, I see. Heth, I wid lek weel at Betty an Mary wis here, ta see dis. Sofas, an cushions, an shairs o every description; an as fur da wid! I don't believe at Solomon hed onything better in his Temple. Bit I don know. We'll better keep Betty whaar shu is. If shu cam ower an saw dis, shu wid tink her chiffonier an da sattee siccan smaa drink at shu wid be fur sellin dem an gettin dearer wans. I daarsay shu's better at hom. Dir no end ta dis weemen. Weel, weel, we'll hae a fine time goin ta Papa an Foula i da laek o dis. Everything as bricht as a new shillin, doon ta da very nail-heads, an as clean

as a new preen. It most be da cedar o Lebanon, I tink, at shu's plenished wi. Ay, min, its fine. Dan look ye at da beds, every wan laek da driven snow, pits you in mind more o a cradle as onything else. Heth, da jantry know what ta du wi da money."

After the whole party had duly admired the yacht from stem to stern, and all had gathered on the quarterdeck, two smart stewards came forward with cake and tea, and withīn a few minutes the whole company were soon *en rapport*, the gentlemen discussing golf, fishing, shooting, scenery; the ladies exchanging opinions on the latest styles of feminine dress in its multifarious aspects.

"Very well, then," the Captain was heard saying to the Chairman as the impromptu meal came to a close, and H.M. Commissioners rose to take their departure, "to-morrow forenoon we will have the pleasure of accompanying you to see the new golf course, and the other wonderful things you have been telling us about. Then in the evening we will have the further pleasure of your company at dinner on the yacht here. Oh, this is the Practical Member? this is the gentleman whose name is on everybody's lips—Mr Laurenson? I cannot say how pleased I am to meet you. We sailors like practical men, for unless, as you know, a sailor is practical, journeying on the sea would be rather risky. Now, Mr Laurenson you understand that we are at the absolute disposal of the Commission—short of hanging you know—for the next three weeks. It is for you to command; for us to obey. To the dinner party to-morrow evening I hope you

will not forget to bring your good wife and daughter. We wish to have a nice, happy evening, as a set-off to our wanderings hereabout; and Mrs and Miss Laurenson would just make the party complete."

"Weel, I'll see what Betty haes ta say to it, thank you kindly."

"Yes, please do. Well, then, good-bye all, till to-morrow morning."

After the party had reached the hotel, and had discussed among themselves the yacht, and the officers, and the ladies—regarding the latter of opinions whom differed widely—the Chairman said—

"There's one thing we must do. If they invite us to dinner on board the yacht, as they have done, we are duty bound to return the compliment. We must invite them to dinner here."

"I suppose dat 'ill hae ta be don, alto I can see no sense or profit in it. If we're goin ta sit an gie een anidders denners every day, whan 'ill we get ta Papa an Foula? Dat's what I wid laek ta ken?"

"We're not going to get and give dinners every day, silly," said the Tittie. "These are merely preliminary courtesies, which have to be attended to by people in every grade of civilised life. I am looking forward to the dinners, I assure you."

"Heth, I kno o wan person ats not lookin forward ta dem—at laest ta wan o dem."

"And who may that be?"

"Wha may dat be? Its Meggie. I assure you Meggie tinks shu haes anof ta du, vargin an

cookin an cleanin fur wis. If ye aks her ta du mair even fur wance, shu'll not do it; not she. Dats my opinion."

"I must go and see Maggie at once. Without Maggie we can do nothing. And it would be simply awful for them to ask us to dinner and we not return the compliment."

"Ye can go an aks her. Ye'll better mak sure o her afore ye aks dem. I don't know aboot Betty an Mary," the P. M. solioquised while the Tittie was away interviewing Miss Margaret. "I don know. Dey'll laekly say dey hae naethin ta pit on. Dats da general wye wi dis weemen. Dir everlastingly gettin, an yet dey never hae onything ta pit on whin da time comes. What dey mak o it, da Loard knows, fur I don't. I don know. If ye go an aks dem, dey'll want ta come, an yet dey'll be as mad as da ill helt at dey wir insulted bi being left oot. So ye don't know hoo ta steer. An of coorse dey'll be sure ta hear at dey wir ment ta be akstd. Weel, an what lüde is Meggie on?"

"Maggie is in a very bad lüde, I can tell you."

"I towld you dat."

"She says not for all the yachts in the kingdom, nor even for the King upon the throne, will she undertake a dinner for twenty-one persons."

"Weel, I don't blame da woman. Human natir can only go till a certain point, you know. I'm windered mony a time how shu howlds oot, wi aa da help at she haes, ta get wir baand maeted day oot day in. An dan ta heave anidder eight ipun her wi a great set-doon denner, its too much, you know; its too much."

"There's one way out of the difficulty that Maggie hinted at."

"An whats dat?"

"Unless we get some assistance from Lerwick, she'll not touch the thing, she says, with her little finger."

"Dats a good anof idee. Meggie wis always sensible. Ye can aye depend ipon Meggie for soond sense. What wan can't do, twa or tree micht."

"There's just the difficulty of getting the girls here in the short time."

"I see nae difficulty in dat. Wance ye get a hould o da girls, ye'll shun get dem up here. Wir ye tinkin o onybody?"

"I believe we could get two or three from the Queen's Hotel. The dinner must come off, you know, these is no question about that. It would be nothing short of a disgrace if we failed to give a return dinner; so assistance must be got. Maggie is in a high-and-mighty frame of mind, I can tell you, and we'll need to navigate her with care and circumspection. In fact, to let you into a secret, she told me she had warned, and was leaving in a month. So she's not anxious, naturally, for extra work."

"Oh, ho—o—o, Meggie! Eh, hem! Haes she gotten onything in her eye, tink ye?"

"I think she has got a good deal in her eye—a very great deal, in fact."

"Yiss, yiss; juist so. Is Mr E. been doin onything, tink ye?"

"Mr E. has been doin a great deal, I can tell

ycu. He has proposed, and Maggie has accepted him. More than that. The wedding has been fixed to take place in six weeks. That's news for you. But remember, don't mention it just now to a soul."

"I, I? I? Na, na, my daatie, ye could tell me whin ye wir gaen ta get mairied yoursell, and I wid never leet on, not even ta Betty, aless, of coorse, ye lat me. I wid juist laek ta ken what maenner or vynd or wye Mr E. guid aboot it. I winder what he said?"

"Said? What does any man say?"

"Dat's juist da point. What du dey sey? Faith, I don't tink I ever said wan wurd ta Betty at aall."

"Stuff and nonsense. How could Betty know unless you asked her?"

"Know? Dir no faer o her or ony idder een knowin. Dis weemen haes what we caa instink. Dey know in a language better as wirds. Wirds is very clumsy things sometimes, you know."

"Perhaps you asked her in a song?"

"Not I, heth. It wis juist sort o wye agreed ipun, ye ken, an da thing wis settled, an dey wir nae mair aboot it. Bit I doot if da Leetry Man wid hae da vynd ta pit da whestin itoot aksin it. Ye see, dir mony a wye o doin a thing. Dir da eye, you know, an da haand, an da—"

"Foot, perhaps?"

"Weel, maybe."

"Well, anyone who proposes to me, and asks me to forego my liberty for the rest of my life, will

have to do it in a proper way, with a deep sense of his own utter unworthiness."

"Juist so. Juist so. Ye'll be wan o da kind at wants da poor man ta come ta da room efter ye're agreed ta hae a interview, as ye caa it, and faa ipun his knees, strik his head ipu da grund, pit his haand till his hert, an swear by da heevens abun an da ert below an da sea underneath; an lat him never rise oot o dis spot, bit he worships da very grund ye walk ipun; an dat a smile fae you is Paradise, an a frown da idder place; an dat if ye could bit lower yoursell ta howld oot wan breath o hop, he wid be da happiest man i da Universe; an at if ye could ever tink ta tak him, he wid never, never, never, no never, never, never tink or even draem o ony thing under da canopy o heeven accept yourself. Dat's da wye at you want it don, I suppose?"

"I don't want anything silly; but I certainly expect that the man who wants me should ask me in a proper manner."

"Bit suppose da poor sowl wis in sic a pipperation at he couldna get da wirds oot; an his tongue, as da Scriptir says, clave ta da roof o his mouth? An what aboot you wantin him, my jewel? Do you mean ta tell me, as a sensible person, at you wid lat a chap at you wanted go away becaas he didna an maybe couldna pirpose ta you wi aa rules o grammar?"

"Oh, get along. We're standing talking a lot of nonsense. The whole point is, just now, to stroke down Maggie so that she undertakes this dinner."

"Dats aesy anof don. Aa you hev ta do is

ta geng ta da Chairman an tell him hoo da case staands. He'll be more as willing ta send you ta da toon, I assure you, wi a couple o motors ta bring up ta bits o lasses, since lasses ye most hev. Every motor run, don't you see, piles up mileage. Dat's da very thing we want ta do fur da report, you understand."

"Oh, its an easy thing to pile up mileage if that's all that's wanted. The worst is, I may go to the town, and not be able to get the girls."

"Weel, dir no grit haerm in dat. The mileage is don, at ony rate, an dat's aye somethin, since da Govermint want it. Bit ye'll get da lasses. Dey'll be ower blid ta come here fur a run, I assure you. So go you an tell da Chairman aall about it, and I'll go an see Meggie mesell. I'll hae a talk wi Meggie. Ye can lat me ken what da Chairman tinks."

* * * * *

"Weel, Meggie, what's dis I'm hearin about dee?"

"Hearin' about me? What ir ye hearin about me?" asked Maggie, who seemed somewhat disconcerted at the P. M.'s brusque question.

"I'm not hearin a great deal o guid, does du know, an I most say I'm surprised."

"Oh, dear-a-me! What's dis noo? Wha is been spaekin about me?"

"I suppose du's wantin ta be i' da fashion, noo I come ta tink about it. Labour troubles, I hear. Wantin ta get oot o dee wark, laek aa da rest."

“ Da person at said I wis wantin ta get oot o mi wark haes a sin ipun dir sowl at 'ill tak a lok o washin away. No, no; dat's wan thing I never did, in my life, as get oot o mi wark. I'm done far ower muckle, I can tell you. Toiled an slaved fae ta time I could staand.”

“ Yiss, maybe, an dir mony a wan da sam. Bit what's dis at I'm hearin fae Miss F., at du winna look efter da denner at we hae ta gie ta da officers o da yaacht?”

“ I wid du onything in raeson fur Miss F., fur shu's as fine a lady as ever trampid; and I micht even du somethin extree fur you; bit ta prepare an cook a denner fur twinty-wan folk, and five o dem weemen, an maybe mair, is a thing I'll do nedder fur man, woman or shild. Noo, hed it been men aatagedder, I micht a tried it, fur dey'll pit up wi things, an dir no sae dirty parteeklar. Bit ta hae five, an maybe seeven weemen, wheeper-snappers fae da sooth some o dem, stimin at dis, an turnin up dir nose at da next thing, an makin remarks if things wisna dune til a turn—no, no, dat I will not undertak. I hae mair ta do as I can get troo.”

“ Dat maybe is so; bit my Meggie, what's ta be don? We hev ta give da denner, du knows.”

“ Give da denner? What's da call ta give da denner? Loard love me, as I tink at dis jantry does nothin bit aet, aet, aet, everlastingly aet. As fur wark! Dear when! What du dey know aboot it? I toucht at dis Commission wis set oot ta du some wark. Wark! Fur da wark at dir doin! Goin gallivantin aboot laek a baand o fules, playin

demsells, an pittin wark ipu idder folk. Dat's aa at dir doin. An you're juist as bad as da rest noo, I see dat."

"Weel, my Meggie, da wye o da thing is dis, du sees. Govermint gae a sum o money ta fin oot aboot paets—"

"An why dunna you fin oot aboot paets, dan?"

"My lamb at du is, we're funn oot a braa coarn aboot paets already; bit doesna du see, da money is ta be spent every year fur tree years, an it can never do—its not sense—ta finn oot everything i da first year. Da information most be spread, as you wid say. An seein at da money haes ta be spent, I see no sense in lattin it lie."

"Govermint gets it very aesy, shurly, if yon's da wye dey slash it aboot. Noo you're gotten a yaacht ta play yoursells wi."

"Yae, dats fur wir holyday, du knows. Bit, my Meggie at du is, supposin onything happened at made dee wan o dis Commission—in a wye, I mean—"

"Me wan o da Commission? Hoo could dat be?"

"Weel, du nicht not exakly be wan o wiz, fur of coorse we wir appointed bi da Govermint. Bit supposin ony o da crood took it inta dir head ta faa in love wi dee, and mairy dee, what wid do say aboot da Govermint slashin awey da money dan?"

"I know at I wid hae as gude a richt til it as ony idder body. Dat's aall at I ken, if wark coounts fur onything."

"Weel, weel, we'll see. In dat case we widna be a baand o fules dan. No, no. Du'll maybe

be mistress E. yet. I widna say. Bit I wis juist goin ta say, Meggie, du'll no be awkward aboot dis denner if du gets somebody ta help dee, I hoop?"

"Weel, if some whalified persons comes an does da wark, I'll look efter it, fur Miss F.'s sake, fur shu's aafil set ipun da denner. Bit no idder wy will I lay a finger ipun it."

"Noo, dat's more laek deself. Dir no guid in bein awkward. Folk sood try an du what dey can. We're doin what we can. Da Tittie, I understand, is goin ta Lerrick ta get a howld o twartree lasses at kens aboot denners o dis kind, an dey'll laekly be up an du da most o da wark. Hoo 'ill du get on we dem, tinks du?"

"Oh, heth, I tink I'll laeve da most o it ta dem-sells. Dey laekly tink at dey ken aa aboot it. We'll see whin dey come. Aa da sam, less micht a saired."

"Never du mind, Meggie; its aa richt. We'll aa be dancin at dy weddin very shun, fur aless I'm tint da grain o wit da Loard gae me, things is shapin dat wye. An wha 'ill du da cookin fur her, tinks du? Dat'll be a day. A day, say I? A week, Meggie, nothin less as a week whin du shanges dee name. Faith, fur her, we'll need aa da servants fae baith da hotels."

"Geng awa wi you. You're aye palaaverin aboot some dirt or anidder," answered Meggie, who was, however, by no means ill-pleased at Jerry's good-natured banter.

“An hoo got ye on wi da Chairman, my jewel?”

“Oh, after I had explained the whole matter to him, he cordially approved of the suggestion to get assistance from Lerwick. He said that it was imperative that the dinner should be given, and that in first-class style. So I am to take a couple of motors and go to Lerwick at the first favourable opportunity and see what can be done.”

“I toucht dat. Da twa motors ’ill pit on aboot anidder twa hunder mile ta da distance travilled bi da Commission. Dat’s wan guid point. An dan of coorse, ye’ll get ower da trouble wi Meggie aboot da denner. Dats anidder. So, you see we’re always doin somethin. Noo, I winder if I sood go an see Betty an Mary aboot coming to da denner on da yaacht da moarn? I don know. Dey say its better ta lat sleepin dugs lie. Maybe it is, sometimes. Bit not always. Not always.”

CHAPTER LVIX.

More Mileage piled up in fetching a Doctor to Joanie.

On mature consideration, Jerry came to the conclusion that it would be wiser, and much safer, to run over to Eshaness and consult Betty and Mary about the dinner—tell them that they were invited to be present, and give them the opportunity of refusing or accepting the invitation. “You can never tell, you know, what wy dis weemen take a thing. Dir edder ipun wan side or da idder; dir never ida middle. Dey canna tak da strecght lang view o things at men does. No, no. So, I suppose its juist dir natir to.”

“Weel, Mary, whaar’s Joanie?” he asked of his daughter, whom he met outside on his arrival at the “abod.”

“Joanie, Joanie; don’t mention Joanie. Fir sic a day as we’re hed.”

“What’s up noo?”

“Dat Sathan guid away dis moarnin wi twa idder boys ta look fur birds eggs i da banks; an whin dey didna come back bi denner time midder got in sic a state at I hed ta geng an look fur him.”

“Weel, an did du finn him?”

“Finn him? Yes, I faun him; bit whaar? an in what a state?”

“ What state wis he in ? ”

“ State ? He wis nearly droondid. Dat’s da state at he wis in. ”

“ Weel, bit he wisna droondid. ”

“ No, bi da mercies o da Loard he wis not, smaa tanks to him. Oh, dis boys, dis boys ; dis deevil’s boys. ”

“ Lass, wheest wi dee. Dir nothin more natril as fur a boy to go an look fur birds eggs, an if he gets a coarn o weet i da bye-gain, dat’ll no hurt him. Hoo wis he nearly droondid ? ”

“ Weel, he juist fell inta da sea, an he couldna get himsell oot. Dat wis aa. ”

“ An wha took him oot ? ”

“ Da idder twa boys at wis wi him. Bi da mercies o’ Providence, dey could baith swim, an of coourse, as you ken Joannie canna— ”

“ Dats no my faut. I wanted him ta laern lang ago. Bit you weeman, of coourse, widna lat da object go inta da sea. An hoo could da boy laern aless he guid inta da sea ? An dey got him oot, did dey ? ”

“ Yiss, dey got him oot, an not afore da time. Whin I came ta da place, dey wir juist getting Joannie’s breath intill his boady. Dat wis aall. We hed nearly ta carry him hom. ”

“ Ay, ay, dis is bad, I must say. An hoo is he ? An hoo is dee midder ? ”

“ He’s sleepin, fur wan mercy ; an midder is juist fair clumpsed. She can tink or spaek aboot nothin bit Joanie. Oh, dis boys an dir onkerry ! ”

“ Weel, we’ll hae ta go in. Dis is juist da wye (he muttered to himself). Dir alwis some mis-

chief brewin. I doot if Betty 'ill come ta da denner efter da laek o dis. I doot it. I doot it."

"Mary is been tellin me aboot Joannie."

"Yiss."

"He seems ta be sleepin aa richt."

"Oh, yae, yae, he's aa richt. Oh, yis. Everything is aa richt wi you men. Oh, dat, dat. Dat's been wan day."

"Its no do first time at a boy hae gotten a drap o weet."

"No, bit its da first time at Joannie is been nearly droondid, sae far as I ken; alto I needna say dat, fur du nearly hed him droondid deesell in Ler-rick."

"Weel, ye hae ta blame yoursells til a great extent. Ye widna lat da boy laern ta swim. No no. Dat ye wid not. Bit sae lang as he's no been hurtid onywy, dir nae faer o da saat water duin him ony haerm."

"Dere's da men again. Everything lookid at fae da ootside. Loard save me! I wonder what wid come o dis world if it wisna fur da weemen in it, ta tak^d care an look efter an guide, yiss, an guide, dis dereeshans o men. Yiss, He help me, as dey hae ta be guided and lookid efter laek infants, yiss, laek infants, fae da craidle ta da grave, bi weemen. Joannie looks weel anof fae da oot-side, een noo; bit what du we know? Da bairn is maybe been mirakled i da inside, sprung himsell, fur aa at we ken. Mary towld me at da whantity o saat water at cam oot o dat dear infant wis anof ta droond him. No, no. We'll tak nae ootwird signs. Whedder he's braethin saft or not, he's

got ta be lookid efter bi somebody at kens. An da best at du can do, an do it strecht away, is ta tak wan o yon motors at you're for evermore flyin aboot wi laek a baand o slippid fules, an go ta Lerrick an bring a doctor here at wance. I can get no rest fur my boady or mind till I ken aa at is ta ken."

"Well, dat micht be don too."

"It 'ill hae ta be don. Du's spent as muckle money ipon wan foally an anidder as shurly ta think nothin o spending somethin ta look efter dee ain flesh an blod."

"Oh, I'm aye lookid weel efter mi ain flesh an blod, as I ken ta mi ain cost, an I can du it yet, an will do it. If da boy needs a doctor, a doctor he'll get, alto I raelly see little need fur it. Mony is da time at I'm com hom wi a weet hide, an aa at I got wis a soond wheepin. Dat warmed me up, at ony rate; an efter I got dry claes on I wis aa richt. Of coorse I don't say at I ever swallyed buckets o saat water, alto wan time I hed a guid sap ithin me, at made me feel wheer fur twartree 'oors."

"I'm no carin what du did, or what dee folk did. What I'm concerned aboot is dis boy at dis parteeklar moment. Don't staand an waste ony more time, fur Gude sake, bit geng an fetch a doctor, an be back dis very nicht wi him. Mind dat."

"Weel, its kind o late noo; bit I'll see what can be don. Keep da bairn warm an gie him a air o tae whin he waakens. He'll shune be aa richt."

"Keep him warm! As if I needid ta be towld ta keep him warm. If du haes ta go ta da toon,

an da shops is no shut, buy twartree oranges. Da bairn 'ill be thirsty."

"If I hae ta geng ta da ton, I'll need ta look slippy; fur alto da nicht is lang, da doctor 'ill no care juist aa tagedder maybe ta come fae hame sae late. Wan thing it 'ill do, though; it 'ill pile up more mileage. Dat 'ill be a run doon an a run up, an a run doon an a run up again. So, dat sood make weel on ta twa hunder miles. Noo, I'll try an be back da nicht, late though it most be. Fur a mercy da motor at took me across is juist up here at da daeks."

As the P. M. betook himself to where the motor was waiting, he reflected that it would be sound policy to make every endeavour to get a doctor at once. Betty's mind would be relieved, and Joannie would soon be on his legs again, for he saw that he had got no harm. Betty and Mary would then be in a better frame of mind to discuss the question of the dinner.

"Noo, mi lad, we hae ta go ta Lerrick as fast as da car can run. We're goin fur a doctor, so open her up."

"A doctor? Is anyone ill?"

"Oh, weel, da boy is haed a bit o a misanter, an his midder is anxious aboot him. He fell inta da sea, an dey say da bairn wis nearly don wi it."

"Dear-a-me. That's not good. I have plenty of petrol, and I daresay we can be in Lerwick in an hour and a half, barring accidents and delay."

"Dat wid juist do. I hae wan or twa aerands

fa get, an da shops shuts noo sae venamous early at a body can harly get wan."

In less than four hours Jerry was back at Eshaness with the doctor. As he said, he had wasted no time on the road; and the doctor, as soon as he heard that the invalid was the youngest son of the Practical Member of the Peat Commission, evinced the greatest interest, and said he would accompany his father at once. A careful examination revealed the satisfactory fact that Joannie was nothing the worse of his immersion in the sea, or of the salt water he had swallowed. All that was needed was to keep him warm and give him nothing but light diet for a day or two. There was nothing to hinder him getting up to-morrow forenoon.

"Thank you, sir," said Betty. "What you say taks a lod off o mi mind. Wan never knows what might be wrang efter da laek of what da bairn is gon troo, an folk hae ta tak care. I wid a been awfil blied ta pit ye up fur da nicht, fur its a lang piece ta Lerrick, bit wir hoose is harly ready fur dat een noo."

"We'll no be lang in ripping doon ta Lerrick," said Jerry. "Da nicht is fine, an dir plenty o licht. Da main thing is at da boy is gotten nae haerm. We'll aye manage da rest."

Next morning, after breakfast, when things looked more propitious, Jerry thought he could broach the subject of the dinner. Joannie, although still in bed, was bright and contented, enjoying himself reading an interesting book; and Betty was altogether in a better frame of mind.

“Dir goin ta be a denner on board da yacht i da efternoon.”

“Oh, ir dey?”

“Yiss, dey ir. An what’s more, dee an Mary is invited til it.”

“Me an Mary invited til a denner on a yaacht? What yaacht?”

“It’s a funny thing at some o dis weemen don’t know what’s goin on roond aboot dem. Does du not know at dir a yaacht come here fur tree weeks fur wir holyday?”

“Holyday! I tink its aa wan holyday, fur dat maitter. You’re haein wan rinnin aboot, wastin time.”

“Weel, my Betty, as lang as doo an me an wirs gets something oot o it, I don’t see why du sood grumble. We’re as weel waard it as mony anidder een, I know dat.”

“Nae doot aboot dat. Bit still, its awfil juist ta see folk at’s supposed ta hae sense playin dem-sells. Denner? What’s da denner fur?”

“Fur? Its juist a denner, ta lat da officers o da yaacht an wis get acquaat. An da Cap’n wis very parteeklar at du an Mary sood come.”

“What did he ken aboot me? Hoo cam he ta ken aboot Mary an me?”

“Dere du goes again. I suppose du doesna ken at dis Paet Commission is known aboot ower all da lent an breedth o da laand. Yiss, even in France, I’m towld, dir reading aboot it. An of coorse if dey ken me, dey ken dee. Dat’s aall.”

“It’s a boanie kennin. Bit denner? Hoo

can we geng til a denner among aa da jentry? We hae nothin ta pit on."

"Na, na, you never did. Never; no, not at ony time; it doesna maitter what its fur, ye never hae onything ta pit on. Bit somehoo or idder, ye alwis fin something, whin ye want."

"I dunna ken. What wid Lowra Maikomson an mair as her, say aboot me an Mary bein aff on a yaacht dinin wi jantry?"

"What's du got ta do wi Lowra Maikomson? Du nicht as weel say at I soodna go becaas Erty Maikomson wid speak aboot it. An du doesna seem ta see at its wan o dis things at du can harly refuse."

"Hoo is dat?"

"I'm wan o da Commission, an I hev ta be dere; an as da wife o wan o da Commission, du haes as much richt ta be dere nearly as meself. It's what dey caa a social duty, an alto dis is sometimes expensive, an sometimes very awkward, dey hev ta be don."

"I see nae call edder fur denners or suppers. I wiss folk wid juist get on wi dir wark an be in paece. It wid be far better fur dem, an fur every idder body. Aa at I see folk doin noo-a-days is pitten mair hard wark tryin ta get plaesir ta dem-sells as pittin in a richt wye wid du some guid. Fur da wark at dey mak plaesirin! An hoo can I hae a mind ta geng til a denner wi da boy lyin in his bed?"

"Da boy is a richt. He'll be up in a oor or sae, an da denner 'ill not tak dat lang."

"I canna tink o laevin him bi himself after

dis; an Mary 'ill want ta geng ta da denner of coorse. I dunna ken."

"Hoots! Du's not goin ta disgrace da Practical Member o da Commission bi stayin at hom. Dir no need for it. An seein at da Cap'n asked fur dee, it wid look very ill if du didna turn up."

"I dunna ken, I'm sure," said Betty in a tone which Jerry knew that she did know, and had made up her mind to go. "If I had ony een at I could laeve Joanie wi, at I could trust—bit wha can trust onybody ipun dis ert except yourself? I might tink about it."

"Aa at Joanie needs is twartree boys in aside him, ta howld him oot a langer. Dey'll be aa richt, if we juist lay waarnins on dem."

"Da boys may be aa richt if dey get a woman tae look efter dem. No idder wye. No, no, I hae nae faith in boys, or men edder, left ta demsells."

"Weel, Willa Biglan is no far away."

"Willa has sense, laek most weemen; and if we got her, the thing micht be don. Mary micht geng an ask if shu could come ower for a while da nicht, as lang as I'm oot. If she can come, da thing micht be don; bit no idder wye. I'm not wan at laeves mi bairns ta demsells ta du onything dey laek, like some idder folk."

Whether this last remark was of general or particular application, Jerry was not altogether sure, and was careful not to inquire. He knew when to leave sleeping dogs lie. The main thing was that he had got Betty set in motion, and he had no doubt

in his own mind that she and Mary would be at the dinner.

"I'll walk ower, I tink, an see hoo things is shapin. I'll be back wi da motor in plenty o time. Da denner is no till six o'clock."

"Six o'clock? Six o'clock? Du's not wise."

"I'm wise anof. Dis jantry never taks dir denner till six o'clock, an sometimes eicht."

"Dey nicht as weel never tak it at aall, dan. Six o'clock?"

"Well, dat 'ill give you aa da more time ta get fixed up."

"Dear wan! Six o'clock! Yae, we ought ta hae time ta get aa at we hae ta pit on pitten about wiz. Six o'clock! Fur sic a hearin!"

* * * * *

Lowra and Ertty had been at the Hillswick shop for some messages. While there they had been asked if they had heard of the grand dinner party the officers of the yacht were giving that night to the members of the Peat Commission. They had heard something about it, and had been told that only some half-dozen of the Commission—the heads—had been asked; the "ruck" had been left out. Anyone who had told them that had made a mistake, they were further informed, for everyone, down to the message boy, had been invited. More than that, the captain had specially asked Betty and Mary Laurenson, the wife and daughter of the P. M., to be present. To Laura this information was as a red rag to a bull. She said nothing, but

thought a great deal; and when she and Erty left the shop, she was fuming with rage, all the greater because it was pent up. She and Erty left the shop, he carrying a pretty heavy burden on his back, and she a basket on her arm.

“Wha tink ye is dis?” said Erty, innocently, “comin stoorin alang in a motor?”

“Wha tink you is dis? Man, whaar’s dee eyes? Is do never able ta see onything? Can du never see farder as dee nose? Dis? Dere dey go. Whisked past laek wheens, an wiz ta staand on wan side ta lat dem go by. Dats Mistress Betty—Elizabeth, I mean—Laurenson, an Miss Mary going to a dinner in the yacht, you know (in her scorn Laura broke into pure English). Dressed up to the nines with pearl brooches, and tippets, and aigrettes, and silks and satins. Da pride ats ipu dat; yiss, da stinkin pride. Its not walkin, or even drivin, bit motoring, at can sair mi leddyship now. Aall we’re got ta do now is ta howld up wir haand, an da motor staands at da door, ta go wharever we please. Relly, its juist aboot anof, dis, an more as anof, ta see da laek o dat. Erty Maikomson, du’s getting owld, an I’m not young; bit if du doesna get ipu dis Commission afore da simmer is oot, I’ll go mad; dat’s what I will.”

“Weel, my Lowra, we’re doin aall we can,” replied Erty, who in his innermost soul thought that Lowra was not far away from being mad already.

“Doin? What’s du doin? If dir ony doing its me at’s doin it.”

“Weel, its no come ta muckle yet?”

“Hoo can it come ta muckle, wi a man at

doesna hae da spedimint o a hen, as I'm said afore," tartly replied Lowra, whose sore spot—the want of success in her efforts to get on the Commission—was roughly touched by Ertty's reply. "Hoo can it come. I'll say dis fir Jirry Laurenson, at ony rate—he haes some sense."

Ertty having been told about five thousand times in the course of his life that he had none, was not very greatly perturbed by the reply. Lighting his pipe, he trudged solemnly alongside his spouse till home was reached.

CHAPTER LX.

The Commission leave Northmavine and go to Yell
by the "Earl."

Two boats had put ashore from the yacht to take the members of the Peat Commission on board for dinner. Every mark of respect was paid them. Each boat was in charge of a lieutenant, "dressed all in his best"; and the crews seemed to be as anxious about the Commissioners' comfort as the officers. Arrived at the yacht, they were met at the gangway by the captain and other officers; the ladies on board attending to those from the shore, and taking them to their own cabins to make themselves ready for the great event.

"Its not a bad thing at aall ta be on dis Government jobs — da richt kind, laek dis, I mean," remarked the P. M. to Mr D., while being rowed off. "Ye get attended til in a richt wye, an da higher up ye go da more attention ye get."

"Oh, its not a bad job, so long as you don't insist on us casting peats," said Mr D., with a laugh.

"Heth, well hae ta du somethin in dat line, efter wir holyday. We're only haed twa sittins, an I widna winder ta see some o yon venamous objects writin ta da papers aksin whestins aboot wiz. Of coorse, as I'm said afore, da folk at does da laek

o dat haes mair time as wit. Aa da sam, dir no use o giein dem ony haandle ta wirk on. I tink we'll hae ta geng oot o Nortmavine efter wir holyday. We must go ta Yall, ye know. Yall is da place fur paets. Dan da folk. What tink ye o da folk?"

"I know nothing about the people of Yell."

"No, you can't be expedid. I do, til a certain extent. Fine folk, da Yall folk; not so bad. Of coorse dir not up ta Nortmavine; bit dir aafil kindly, you know, an aafil fur spaekin ta folk. Whinever ye get ta Yall, you hae ta spaek ta everybody you meet. Mind dat. Dont forget dat. An aafil fu o fun. Oh, yiss, yiss. Oh, dir no sae bad at aall."

"Any striking scenery in Yell?" asked Mr C., who had overheard this conversation.

"Weel, yiss, dey ir a little. Nothin, of coorse, laek Nortmavine; bit bits here an dere not bad. Gloup Voe is fine. Dir nae doot aboot dat."

"And how do you get to Yell?"

"Oh, dat best wye is wi da Earl. Of coorse, da yaacht could laand wiz dere afore shu guid away. Bit dat wid harly do. Da yaacht haes ta attend ta wiz fur tree weeks exackly, an no more. Noo, ye see, if shu pat wiz ta Yall, dat wid tak a day aff o wir holyday, an dat wid never do; fur I'm towld da proper thing wi aa dis public folk laek wirsells is ta tak da holyday ta da last oor, more parteeklarly as dir paid fur it. Na, na, da richt thing is ta tak da holyday fu oot, dan hae a bit o rest, an mak ready ta motor doon ta Lerrick an go ta Yall i da

‘Earl.’ Hillo, here we ir at da yaacht. So, we’ll shun be aboard safe an soond, an dan fur da wark.”

“Da wark,” as the P. M. called it, proceeded cheerily and satisfactorily. The cabin had been gaily decorated to mark the occasion, and looked very bright and handsome, the officers’ uniforms and the ladies’ dresses adding greatly to the beauty of the scene. Betty was given the place of honour by the captain’s side; and the Tittie had a similar compliment paid her beside the croupier. The other ladies were “mixed” among the gentlemen promiscuous, as Mark Twain would have said. Everyone declared that the dinner had been a complete and unqualified success, the songs contributed after dessert by the Tittie and the P. M., among others, adding zest to the enjoyment. The only “rift within the lute,” in the view of the Tittie, lay in the fact that her “chap” paid, she considered, far too much attention to the rather haughty young damsel who was one of the yacht party, and who, seeing how the wind lay, laid herself out to be as charming to Mr I. as she could. Her efforts in this direction were very successful, for the young lady in question was a finished coquette, and, anyone could see, her prey fell readily into the trap set for him. The result was that the Tittie did not speak a word to her swain for three whole days afterwards, and her dislike for her rival visibly increased.

“Do you know I tink at Mr E. haes taen twartree draps o what dey caa yon champagne ower muckle,” remarked Jerry to Mr D., both of whom

had "not been free of tastin" pretty freely themselves.

"What makes you think that?"

"Weel, did you no notice whin he wis speakin efter da Chairman, thankin dem fur da denner, at wance or twice he got Meggie's name in. Meggie hed nothin ta du wi it. Bit I tink, aa da sam, at he wisna ower weel plaesed at Meggie wisna aksed. Ye're heard aboot him an Meggie, maybe?"

"I have heard a rumour, but I don't know if there is any truth in it."

"Oh, its true anof. Dir goin ta get mairied in six weeks. A gude, sensible wife 'ill Meggie mak. Hillo, Betty, what's up wi dee," he asked, as the wife of his bosom lurched rather heavily against him in the boat as she descended from the yacht. "Haes du been takin ony o yon champagne?"

"I, I? I juist took wan big gless o lemonade. Na, na; I laeve da drinkin ta da men."

"So, I daarsay dats anof," muttered Jerry, with vivid recollections of his own experience of "lemonade."

The night being fine, and the sea smooth as glass, someone as they glided ashore struck up a song in which all could join, the sound of which was wafted and re-echoed along the quiet bay and borne to the ears of those on shore. Among these were Willa Bigland and Clemie Twatt.

"Lass, what is yon?" asked Willa of her companion, both of whom were on their way home, each knitting a stocking.

"Yon? Weel, canna du see what it is? It's

yon baand o fules; fules, say I? deereshans at's been slippid in dis pairish fur da last fortnight. Yon's da Paet Commission been aff ta da yaacht fur dir denner, comin ashore. Loard save me! What is dis world comin til?"

"Aff at dir denner on da yaacht? What yaacht?"

"Lass, du most be goin aboot wi dee head in a bag. Du most be. Does du no ken at dis yaacht is com here fur dir holyday—dir holyday, nae less. Dir been sae hard wirkid, poor souls, at dey hae ta get a tree weeks' holyday. Oh, fur dat, fur dat. An what tinks du, my jewel, Mrs Laurensen an Miss Mary is amung da crood, amung da jantry noo, I assure dee. Nae spaekin ta small folk laek wiz noo. Na. An I'm hearin at da onkerry is only beginnin. Da new hoose at da Laurensen's is getting—i da meantime, du kens, juist i da meantime—cam wi da steamer yesterday, an Jerry, an a lok o da Commission bodies, is goin ta get her pitten up at wance, ta save da piana, an da chiffionier, an da sattee, an aa da rest at dey boucht in Lerrick, and haed nae place ta pit in. Dis hoose is a iron thing, intil dey get a rael stane hoose biggid. Heth, I hear its goin ta be nae smaa drink, edder. A hoose o six rooms, dey say, planned bi da sam man at biggid dis hotel, du knows. An everything complete; no faer o dat. Hot an cowl'd water; yiss, an dey say dey can get loo water tu oot o yon pipes."

"Dey'll maybe hae saat water as weel," put in Willa.

"Yae, an maybe loch water tu. An door

bells, an bath-room, an pantry, an scullery, an wash-house, an a spare bedroom; an its not ta be saying what dey'll hae. Wance dey begin, its hard ta say whaar dey'll end. An I hear at wance dis iron bisness is up—temporary, its caad, temporary—at Betty is haein da whole yaacht folk up at a set doon in da new abod—residence, I mean, fur dey don't tak lang ta shiv da laek o yon tagedder. An Mary is goin ta Lerrick fur a whole mont ta laern music. So, atween wan thing an anidder, we'll need ta notice hoo we spaek."

"Weel, I alwis fann baith Betty and Jirry mooderate bodies. Rael gude neebirs, an willin ta help onybody. I dunna ken what's uplifid dem laek dis."

"Its being among dis jantry, an nothin else. Onybody can see dat. Wance ye're in ye hae ta be in. You canna help it in a wye. An dan dir da young folk. Its da young folk its gotten dis big notions, more parteeklarly Mary. Shu's not goin ta kerry muck an dell rigs aa her days, I can tell dee, an I don't blame her. If she can get oot o dat, shu's more as richt. I widna winder ta see Mary mairried ta wan o da crood yet."

"Weel, Mary is a good-lookin lass."

"Shu's ower weel, alto dir mony a wan as good-lookin as her i da place. Dan shu'll be a great leddy bi her tale o it. Weel, weel, I dunna ken. Bit wan thing is sure. Shu's not da sam as shu wiz."

"Weel, we aa shange."

"Yiss, bit dir shanges an shanges. So. So be wi dee."

* * * * *

After three weeks' most enjoyable holiday, during which Papa, Foula, and other interesting places were visited; a great deal of bad and a little good golf played; some fishing attempted; some shooting indulged in; some exploration and scientific and antiquarian research made; and withal, as the P. M. said, "a dose of health" laid in, it was decided that a change of venue was both desirable and necessary. The iron house had come along with the tents and golfing requisites and had been erected and occupied; the piano, chiffonier, and settee, and all the other things purchased being now safely housed, Mary had gone to Lerwick for a month to learn music; Joanie was working away at the fiddle; Betty was interested in putting everything about the house in order, and busy looking after the animals and the croft. Northmavine being pretty well exhausted in the two sittings held as regarded information about peats, it was felt that it would be desirable to make further research elsewhere.

This decision was not arrived at without regret. Every member of the Commission declared they had enjoyed themselves very thoroughly in Northmavine. The scenery, the fishing, the people, not to mention peats, had afforded them the greatest pleasure. But the peat question had to be studied in more than one parish in the islands; and however disagreeable it might be to tear themselves from pleasant surroundings, the duty had to be

faced, and arrangements made accordingly.

"I find," said the chief Clerk, "that if we go by the 'Earl,' as Mr Laurensen suggests, we can only go as passengers. We cannot get the vessel specially hired for ourselves."

"Dats aa da better," said the P. M. "It 'ill save some money, an forby, it 'ill mak da 'rip aa da mair homly. We'll see aa da folk at da different places shu gengs till, an dat's nae sma pairt o da plaesir o da voyage."

"What will we do with the motors? We can hardly take four motors on board the 'Earl.'

"Lat da motors pit wiz ta da 'Earl,' an dan rin back ta Hillswick, an lat da yaacht pit dem ta Cullivoe. Dat 'ill no tak lang. Dey'll be dere ta meet wiz whin we get ashore."

"That's a good enough suggestion," said the Chairman. "Well, we'll all better see to our packing. We will leave on Thursday morning, so as to be in town for a short time, and spend the night there. It will be better than rushing down in the morning to catch the steamer. We have a day or two within which to bid farewell to all the friends we have made in this district, and generally to clear up."

"Yiss, dey'll be some clearin up. I winder hoo da young leddies an Meggie 'ill tak dis?"

The young ladies, the P. M. discovered, were rather interested in the prospect of a change, and hailed the prospective journey with every token of satisfaction, although they declared they had enjoyed Northmavine to the full. Meggie, however, was not so enamoured, and showed it.

"Weel, Meggie, du knows we cant stay here fur evermore."

"I suppose no."

"Dan du'll miss wiz, du tink?"

"I'll miss da wark o you, at onyrate."

"Weel, I will say at du's hed some wark wi wiz; bit isna it da highest enjoyment at a woman can hae, ta wirk aboot men?"

"Oh, I daarsay da men tink it. Bit I wisna tinkin aboot da wark sae muckle, as da folk. Dir been ower cheery, an aafil hamely. Dat dey ir."

"Yiss, I tink we'll say dat fur wirsells. Bit du knows what da hyme says,

'Whaar duty caals or danger,
Be never wantin dere.'

We alwiz du wir duty. Dats wan thing we never neglec."

"Maybe no. I'm haerin you."

"Bit I toucht doo wis ta be away fae here in a week—"

"Weel, maybe I will."

"An du's ta be mairied in tree weeks."

"It's no ta be sayin."

"Whaar's du goin ta howld her?"

"Dir nothin been fixed."

"Weel, aa I hae ta say is dis—du's ta lat wiz ken in good time whin shu's comin aff. Fur if it sood tak wiz fae a sittin, we'll rise an come in wan crood ta da weddin. Dats wan thing at du can depend ipun."

"Dan you're laevin on Thursday?"

"We ir, an we're goin ta Cullivoe bi da 'Earl.'"

"So."

* * * * *

"Boy, what's up wi da 'Earl'?"

"What's wrang wi her?"

"Min, shu's gotten aa her flags up."

"What fur?"

"I ken," chipped in another voice.

"What is it?"

"Min, does du no ken at da Paet Commission is goin nort dis moarnin ta Cullivoe?"

"No?"

"Fak. Dats why dir gotten aa da flags up. Here dey ir. Fower motors o dem. Staand oot o mi rod, min. Dere's da P. M., min, an yon's da Tittie, an yon's shurly da Leetry Man. Dere dey go. What a crood. Keep oot o mi rod, min. I want ta see dem."

"What du dey du?"

"Du? Paets, min, paets. Finn oot aboot paets. Dats what dey du. Dere's da third bell. Off shu goes. Hurray."

CHAPTER LXI.

A Trip by the "Earl," and a Sitting at Cullivoe.

One thing that contributed to the enjoyment of the members of the Peat Commission during their first visit to Shetland—and a most important thing it is—was the fine weather. Until August, when the weather broke, the summer of 1917 was exceptionally fine, and the islands were thus seen under the most advantageous condition. Their good fortune followed and smiled on the Commission on their journey to Yell. The day was ideal. A brilliant sun danced on the shimmering sea, which, smooth as a loch and blue as azure, and fanned by a gentle "pirr" of west wind, seemed to invite all and sundry to sail on its bosom.

"Ye twa 'ill surely no be seek dis day," said the P. M. to the Tittie and the high-heeler, who came on deck as the "Earl" was proceeding out the North Entry.

"I hope to goodness not," replied the former. "Of all the sensations a human being can suffer, surely sea-sickness is among the very worst. Foula was all very well. The cliffs are magnificent, and the birds' feathers you got for us are most beautiful, but they were dearly bought, for you nearly lost your life in getting them, and I don't think I

will ever forgive you for the awful fright you gave us all. But the getting to it and back, with that swell in the sea—faugh! it almost spoilt the whole enjoyment. Now, this seems all right, but one can never tell. We thought everything was perfect when we left for Foula; and yet—.”

“ Weel, if ye canna staand dis, you’re only fit ta sail on a loch. I wid laek til a seen you at da haaf in a sixern wi a rael gale o wind. Ye wid a said sunethin dan; or redder, ye widna a been fit ta say onthing.”

“ We have no wish to be on the ocean in a gale in an open boat, or even a closed one. We want comfort, wherever we go. De we go straight to this place? What do you call it?”

“ Dat you don’t. Whin you go bi da ‘Earl,’ you get value for your money, I can tell you, i da maitter o time. It ’ill laekly be six or seeven o’clock afore we get ta Cullivoe. We go first ta Whalsa; dan ta Skerries, I believe; dan ta Hubie, in Fetlar; dan ta Burravoe; an Basta Voe, an Mid Yell; an last o aa ta Cullivoe. So ye’ll see a variety o men an weemen an scenery; da trip gies you a fine shance o seein aa da varieties o baith da een an da idder; an dir a braa lok.”

“ What a glorious day, Mr Laurensen, we are getting for our run,” said the Chairman, some time afterwards, when the steward and the engineer had come on deck for a breath of fresh air and a look round. “ What an entrancing sight is all these little islets and rocks—”

“ Yiss, an baas an skerries. It looks fine e’en noo, in brod daylight on a fine day. Bit I

can assure you shu's not alwis laek dis. Da skipper wid be far better plaesed if dey wir a lok fewer o dem, I can tell you dat; fur on a bad night, an a moorin cavey o snaa, hoo dis 'Earl' goes up an doon, an doon an up, year oot year in, ithoot accident, is paalled me mony a time. Its my opinion at dir a perteeclar Providence at watches ower da 'Earl,' for da whirks an voes an gios an baas an holms at shu haes ta steer troo an amung is anof ta turn a man's hair white. Yet shu alwis does it; shu's juist laek da clock. Of coorse, dir a good crew aboard, you know; dat's da thing. Feth, I believe at some o da crew o da 'Earl' kens da rocks bi da smell o dem a lang wye aff. At laest, dey aye manige ta steer clear o dem."

"What's the name of this island we are now approaching?"

"Oh, dis is Whalsay—da boanie isle o Whalsay, dey caa it. Of coorse its not up ta onything in Nortmavin, bit still—"

"According to you," put in the high-heeier, "there's no place on earth equal to Northmavine."

"Weel, dat's true. I'm juist statin da wirds o truth."

"I wouldn't say that. There's something about the scenery here that's very fine."

"Oh, on a smaa scale, it's no sae bad. Rit dey can't point ta onything equal to what we hae on the wast side, you know. Here we ir, juist goin ta anchir. A lok o boats comin aff, an a aafil pooer o weemen."

After watching all the operations of loading and unloading goods of various and many kinds

for half-an-hour, in which proceedings the members of the Commission were all intensely interested, the anchor was hauled up and the vessel got under weigh again.

“ Aff ta Skerries, noo. Hoo onybody can live on Foola, or da Fair Isle, or Skerries, paalls me aatagedder. Lyin away oot i da very middle o da ocean. Yit its not ta be sayin. I kent a man at wis boarn in Foola an went away ta da Colonies an made some money an cam back an settled doon in it.”

“ Can you get anything to eat on board this vessel ?” asked the Tittie. “ I feel perfectly ravenous.”

“ Aet? Da ‘ Earl ’ is juist da very place ta come ta aet. You can aye get a gude mael aboard da ‘ Earl.’ ”

“ Is dinner far off ? Really, I’m very hungry. The sea always makes me hungry ”

“ Weel, its a good sign. ‘Whin you’re hungry, you’re no very ill. Heth, dere’s da denner bell.”

In five minutes the whole company were seated in the saloon, where, to the accompaniment of happy laughter, bright jests, and, as the P. M. remarked, “ a most oondumious whantity o questins ” asked of the Captain, an excellent meal was partaken of, and thoroughly enjoyed, for the sea air had made them all very hungry. The rest of the nine-hours’ trip was extremely pleasant, and not a bit wearisome. The men walked the deck smoking and talking; the ladies found seats and lost themselves for an hour or two between ports in the pages of a

novel; and the imp was quite himself fraternising with certain youths in the forehead, enjoying his cigarettes and poking fun whenever opportunity offered at those who came aboard or went ashore at the various ports. Every time the vessel dropped anchor, the Commission in a body made for the Captain's bridge, whence they got an excellent view of all that went on, and of the various places visited. The sail, the surroundings, the kaleidoscopic variety of land and seascape, made up altogether an unforgettable experience; and after tea, when the "Earl" dropped anchor at Cullivoe, (a special concession granted by the agent at Lerwick) at 7 o'clock, the company were all in the best of best of humour with themselves and the whole world.

"Yon's a speecial boat at's comin aff fur wiz, I see," remarked the P. M. "Da Clerk towld me he hed arranged fur dat. Dir juist da sam, I see, as ever dey wir. Dey alwis seem ta be amused at everything, dis Nort Yall folk. Dir aye smilin, an haein a joke. Weel, its a gude thing. Heth, dey'll need anidder boat fur wir luggage. Dey'll come fur dat efter we're ashore. Yiss, da Paet Commission is on board," he called down in answer to a hail from the boat. "Dir aa here."

"Including the P. M.?"

"Yae, da P. M., as ye caa him is here too."

"Weel, I must shake him by the hand, at any rate," replied a dark-complexioned individual in knee breeches, who sprang on board and in a trice sought out the speaker.

"You're the actual and real P. M. in the flesh,

are you? Well, my dear sir, I take off my hat to you. For you have more sense, and more fun in you, and more knowledge than the whole British Cabinet put together. So you have come to Yell, have you? Well, you will get plenty of peats in Yell. You've come to the very place for peats of all kinds. And you can get more than peats, I can tell you. You can have fishing and shooting and golfing and boating to your hearts' content.'

"Weel, its aa i da days' wark. I'll hae ta introduce you ta da rest, an dan we'll go ashore." This done, the party got into the boat and were leisurely rowed ashore, where they found four motors awaiting them.

"And what's your programme, may I ask? and where are you putting up?"

"Weel, I understaand at some is pittin up at Gloup, an some at Mid Yell."

"That's a queer arrangement. Could you not all put up in the Ha' of Gloup?"

"Weel, I'm towld its harly big anof fur da crood, ta hae plenty o room, you know. So fower or five is going ta Mid Yell an da rest ta Gloup. Dat wye, ye see it spreads wiz a bit; an forby its useful dis wye. Dem at's in Gloup can go noo an again ta dem at Mid Yell, ta see da place; an dem at's at Mid Yell can go ta Gloup ta see it. Ye see da Government lays a lok o weight on mileage, an of coorse rinnin fae Gloup ta Mid Yell an fae Mid Yell ta Gloup every noo an again 'ill help ta pile up".

"That's true, of course. And are you going to hold any sittings?"

“ Oh, yae; we most hae a sittin at Cullivoe. I’m not shure o Mid Yell an Burravoe. We’ll see, if we hae time. Da wadder is fine, an its harly juist da thing sittin indoors ower muckle. We’ll see. So, we’ll aff ta Gloup, an da idder lok ’ill geng ta Mid Yell. Da sittin ’ill laekly be on Tuesday, ta gie wiz time ta look roond.”

Next day notices were posted on the Church and school-doors that His Majesty’s Peat Commission would hold a sitting in the church on Tuesday first, at 11 o’clock a.m.; and at both services on Sunday the minister of the parish called attention to the fact, among the other notices given. He hoped that a large number would be present at this first sitting of the Peat Commission in Yell. The nation had at last wakened up to the vast importance of peat as fuel, and had appointed the distinguished body of gentlemen who formed this Commission to enquire into the industry in all its phases. As Yell contained a superabundance of peat—in fact, someone had said the whole surface of the island was peat—there was plenty of room for the Commission’s investigations; and he hoped the public would show their interest in the matter by attending the sitting in large numbers.

It cannot be said that the remarks heard on many sides as the people emerged from the church were altogether of a complimentary nature. Osla Meggie Jarmson remarked to her neighbour, Clara Betty Henderson, that “ heth, if yon baand at we’re been readin aboot wid du even da half o wan simmer’s wark i da paets, dey wid ken mair aboot dem as sittin i da kirk fae noo intil da last trump. Finn

oot about paets! Loard be about me! What ir dey wantin ta fin oot about paets? Isna a paet juist a paet?"

"Yiss, my Osla, dat's richt anof; bit du's got ta understand at dir loks o things different noo-a-days ta what dey wir. Da Govermint is doin everything noo. Dey tell wiz what ta aet, an ho^o muckle, an what we're ta du wi wir bits o animils; an mak wiz pey a most gudeless price fur da bit o bread we pit i wir mooths, an everything else; yiss, an dir even got doon to da buits noo. Whaar dey'll laand neist I kno no. I juist wiss at dey wid gie wiz a coarn o daecent sugar ta pit i wir tae; an, as fur dis margarine an dirt at dir giein fur butter—hits not fit fur a dug. Oh, yiss, things is aa different noo, I assure dee. Dere's da ould age pension, fur wan thing. Bit da warst o dat is, is what dey gie wi da wan haand, dey tak back wi da idder."

"Weel, fur my pairt," said Osla, "I'm needer needin, Loard be blissed, nor wantin, nor am I whalified fur da ould age pension. I'm not laek some people, so dey can keep it."

As Clara took this as a direct hit at her age, and her want of worldly possessions, the conversation did not proceed further; but notwithstanding this light ruffle, each determined to be at the sitting on Tuesday. The men, too, appeared to hold no high views about the usefulness to the nation of the proceedings of the Peat Commission. Nevertheless they, too, one and all determined to let Tuesday's work slide, and go, and, as they put it, see the fun.

On the day appointed more people were seen

wending their way to the church of Cullivoe before eleven o'clock than very frequently attended public worship on the Sabbath Day. They came from Gloup, from Gutcher, Sellafrith, as well as the immediately surrounding districts, yea, from even as far as Westsandwick; for the fame of the Commission was abroad in the land, and everyone who could possibly take a day off did so, determined to be at the deliberations of this famous body. The church was therefore packed; and in order to accommodate the Commissioners and staff, the organ had been removed into the vestry.

After the Commission had entered, from the vestry, and taken their seats, the Chairman, evidently highly pleased to see such a large audience, asked the Clerk to call the first witness, James Peter Danielson.

James Peter Danielson immediately got up and went forward.

"You are no doubt aware, Mr Danielson," said the Chairman, "That we as one of His Majesty's Commissions are in this delightful island for the purpose of ascertaining everything that can be found out about peats."

"Yes, sir, so I suppose."

"Already we have been in Northmavine, and acquired and tabulated a vast amount of information that will be of great value to the nation. Now we are in Yell, which some people, I am told, call the cradle of peat, in these islands. Now, in our walks through this district—for we usually spend a considerable amount of time examining both the peats themselves and the conditions in which they

are worked, as well as in holding sittings—we have noticed one rather curious feature about at least some of them here. They are exceedingly thick.”

“Oh, da wans at you saw, laekly, sir, is been more as laek cassen by anidder man fur some idder body.”

“I see. He didn’t cast them for himself, then. That’s the reason they are so thick—some of them very thick indeed.”

“Yiss, I’m seen dem meself more laek divots as onything else. Of coorse, da paets in dis pairish is no aa laek dat. No, no. Da men here can cast paets weel whin dey want.”

“Then why do some of them cast the peats so extraordinarily thick?”

“Weel, ye see, whin dir paid bi da piece, as ye wid say, da thicker da paet da shuner ye get ower da grund. Of coorse I don’t mean ta say at da folk here—da weemen try ta cast tü—aa cuts tick paets whin dir castin till anidder—”

“Heth, du’ll better not,” came from a female at the back of the hall.

“We saw that. We saw that a considerable proportion of the peats were what one would say respectably cut; but we couldn’t understand why there should be such a marked difference. Then what would you say should be the size of a peat?”

“Weel, I wid say aboot fifteen inches bi twa an a-half bi six.”

“Yes, I think that’s about the average size, as far as we can make out. Then, how many peats should a man cast in a day of ten hours?”

“I could not answer dat whestin, sir. I never

heard o onybody in dis place at coontid paets—edder castin, or raisin, or takin hom, or burnin dem. Na, dey nicht coont da twartree stures dey hae; bit as fur coountin paets, sic a thing as dat wid never enter inta dir heads. Dey hae more ta do.”

“We never seem to be able to get accurate information on this important point. Without that information our labours are to a great extent stultified. We will just have to continue our investigation until the information is obtained. Thank you, Mr Danielson, that will do.”

“The next witness is Elspeth Laurenson,” said the Clerk.

“Now, Eppie, mind dee conscience,” a distinctly masculine voice was heard to say, at which adjuration Miss Elspeth turned round, glared, and shook her head in a way that expressed the utmost contempt for the speaker.

“You have considerable experience of the peat industry, Miss Laurenson, I understand,” said the Chairman.

“Yiss, sir; dat I do.”

“You have worked in the peats for a long number of years?”

“Fae some time afore da flod,” some wag interjected, of which remark Eppie took not the least notice.

“During your long experience you would no doubt have noticed considerable differences in the quality of the moor?”

“Oh, yiss, yiss, sir, dir a great differ. Some is good an some is bad an some is warse.”

“Does it ever happen that the moor belonging

to a particular croft is so bad as to be practically useless?"

"Dat does sometimes happen, sir. I ken o wan croft's paets at pat me in mind o what da man said aboot his croft."

"And what was that?"

"He said aboot his croft ta da men at cam here aboot da laand,—whin aa da folk fann oot what da crofts couldna grou—at aa at his croft could grou wis blenda an ooka-doo, an bugara—"

"Woman! Mind whaar you ir. You're staandin in da Hoose o da Loard," said a voice which Eppie recognised, for she tartly replied—"It's not aften at du comes til her, an dir muckle need, as every wan i da pairish knows. I'm juist sayin what da man said. Blenda, an ooka-doo, an bug—"

"Miss Laurenson, what is this? Can you explain what the man meant?"

"Weel, sir, I suppose he meent it dis wye. Da laand couldna grou aets or bere bi demsells, bit it could grou a mixtir o bere an aets, an dat wis caad blenda; an some o it wis sae bad at it couldna even grou dat, an dey hed ta pit mair o wan as da idder, an dis wis caad bug—"

"Noo, Eppie, non o dee swearin."

"Is it not bigger, he meant? Bigger than blenda—more of one than another," said the Chairman. "I hope the reporters are taking this evidence with particular care. It is very important, and will be sent with explanatory notes to the Minister of Agriculture for his information. Yes, and what sort of grain did this mixture produce?"

“ Weel, it wis raelly only fit fur da animals. An forby, dis man’s laand wis sae bad, he said, at it could only grou, ee pairt o it, blenda, an da rest o it ooka-doo, ervie, maldie, tistles, nettles, ee nettles, buggar-an-blenda, an every weed under da canopy o heeven.” (Loud laughter).

“ How do you spell that last word?” asked one of the shorthand writers. “ Is it ‘ big ’ or ‘ bug ’?”

“ I dunna ken.”

“ That man must have had a very remarkable piece of ground to work upon,” said the Chairman. “ It seemed to be able to grow anything.”

“ Yiss, sir, accep da right thing.”

“ Well, the man showed a commendable spirit. He put it to the best possible use. That’s a point we will certainly bring before the Minister of Agriculture. Then you think that peat moor is very much like the land—variable in quality?”

“ Oh, yiss, yiss, dir nae doot aboot dat. Ye see, da sam Loard made baith da wan an da idder. Dir different varieties fur different kind o folk.”

“ Yes, that’s evident. For instance, we have been led to understand, that in this district there are three distinct varieties of peat, used for three different purposes by careful housewives. These are called, we believe, scone peats, firing peats, and washing peats—that is to say, peats of different qualities suitable more for one thing than another,—as peats for baking with, peats for use in an ordinary fire, and peats for boiling the washing-pot, these giving a fierce heat. You couldn’t say, perhaps, whether any particular parts of this district

are known as yielding certain specific kinds? Is there, for instance, a washing-peat district, or a scone district? (A loud titter which ran through the audience was instantly and sternly suppressed).

"Weel, sir, I'm staandin whar I'm heard it. I never heard o scone paets. I'm heard o blue paets, and mossy paets—"

"An horse-flesh."

"No interruption, please."

"An mixed paets, nedder wan thing or da idder. Bit washin paets! Loard—"

"Noo, Eppie, wind whaar du is."

At which interjection Eppie glared in the direction of the speaker with a contempt and look that should have slain him on the spot.

"We have also been informed that particularly careful housewives keep these three qualities of peats separate and distinct—in three stacks."

"I never heard o da laek. We're alwis keepid wir paets in wan stack, an very gled ta get dem dere, fur hits a wark."

"Could you tell us how many peats on an average will be used in an ordinary crofter's house daily?"

"I? I? Hoo could I tell da laek o dat? Na, na, whin it comes ta coontin da paets ye burn, dan I tink its time ta get some idder kind o burn-in."

"Thank you, Miss Laurenson. That will do. Your evidence has been most valuable."

And Eppie went to her seat with the air of one who had gone through the ordeal with credit to herself and the place to which she belonged.

“ We now come to the subject of transport,” said the Chairman. “ Call the next witness.”

“ Laurence John Tulloch,” the Clerk called. Laurence John Tulloch came forward.

“ Now, Mr Tulloch, since we came here, we have given considerable attention to the question of the transport of peats. We have noticed that a good deal is done by ponies, although some carting is done also. Our anxiety is to get precise and accurate information as to the cost of peat, as well as its value as fuel. Can you tell us what it would cost to bring home by pony a stack containing 18,000 peats of average size, a distance of one thousand yards?”

“ No, sir, I could not; and I don’t suppose ony wan i da whole place could tell you dat.”

“ This is how our progress is made so very slow—the difficulty of obtaining precise information. You surely have some idea how long a certain number of ponies take to bring home a year’s burning.”

“ It depends ipun da distance, sir, an da lod ipun da ponies, an da size o da hoose, an da kind o da paet, an loks o things.”

“ We have made particular enquiries in regard to this important matter, and have come to the conclusion that pony transport is very expensive. We found that a stack containing approximately 18,000 peats transported by five ponies, five individuals being also employed, at current rates, and including of course the keep of the ponies and the food of the individuals, came to no less a sum than ten pounds ten shillings. And this only for

a distance of 500 yards. This, it appears to us, is very costly."

"I doot, sir, at you're miscalcated. I never heard o onybody payin dat money here aboot."

"I'm not referring to here about in particular, but all over where ponies are used."

"Nae doot if a person haes to pay fur everything, it moonts up; bit da most o da folk hae horses o dir ain, an forby, horses an boys an lasses can geng whaar cairts canna go."

"No doubt that's true; but I think, in view of this, that we will strongly urge on the Government the need for making roads to the peat hills for small carts. The getting home of the peats is a most important matter."

"Dat wid be very haandy, nae doot; bit I harly tink da Govermint 'ill mak a rod to every paet bank. Alto, its not ta say, dir doin loks o wheer things noo-a-days."

"The peat industry is going to be a big thing in future, especially in Shetland," said Mr C., "and there is plenty of room for its development. In this island of Yell alone there are deposits of peat sufficient to provide fuel which would be of material assistance to the nation for a considerable time. It would have to be worked on a different scale, however, and in a different way."

"Oh, dir ony amount o paets in Yall, everybody kens. Dir moor, dey say, aboot Gloup is 40 feet deep; and as fur da Minister's Mire, dey say its faddomless. Bit I don know if da crofters wid lat da Govermint tak tak dir paets away in thoosans o tons every year, and may be oftener;

I don know. 'Wance dir away dir away; an you can't grow paets laek taaties every year. Folk must hae burnin."

"I am inclined to think the Government would not ask the crofters' opinion on the matter. They would see that the crofters had sufficient moor left to last a reasonable time and with care and proper procedure, for all time. The peat industry in the island might develop to such an extent as to provide employment for the whole population of the islands most of the year."

"I don know if dey wid tank you fur it. Da men's rigs wid be brokken castin; an as fur da weemen, dey wid be nedder shape or form if dey wirkid i da paets aa dir days. Na; da folk laek a coarn o variety o wark; not wan kind aa da time. Forby, what wid come o da crofts?"

"Oh, extensive machinery would be set up to cut, cure, and transport the peats, and the crofts could be attended to as well as before."

"Well, I don know. Maybe. Dey'll maybe cast dem bi machines, an speet dem up ta try da sam wye as dey dry fish, ipun hooks. Bit I don know hoo it wid wirk. I don know what laek speetid paets wid be."

"There is no end to mechanical appliances, and what machinery can do. It's hard to say what yet may be done in Shetland in the direction of developing the peat industry. Are there any suggestions you would make, Mr Tulloch, in regard to this matter?"

"Weel, I wid say it wid be a very good thing if da Govermint wid bring aa da paets hom.

We'll aye manige ta cut dem an cure dem; bit if da Govermint wid send at da richt time dis motor lorries an men ta tak da paets hom, it wid save a lok o wark. Da men could be goin ta da fishin; an da weemen could be lookin efter da bairns an da crofts, an knittin an spinnin, an lookin efter da hoose, an da animals, an ony idder peerie thing ta hadd dem oot o langer."

"Oh, dat, dat," Eppie was heard to say.

"We will certainly keep that in mind," said the Chairman. "The Government is very anxious to develop this industry, from the national standpoint; and any recommendation we may make will certainly receive sympathetic consideration. We have had an excellent sitting, and acquired a good deal of valuable information, and I think you all for your presence here to-day. It shows the wide-spread interest in this very important matter. Our sitting is now at a close."

* * * * *

"Raelly, Eppie, I toucht du wis a Christian woman," said Janny Betty Ridland to Miss Elspeth, as the crowd emerged from the church.

"Christian woman? Wha said I wisna a Christian?"

"Weel, is it da action o a Christian ta staand an swaer i da Hoose o Gude?"

"I swore non. Da person at says 'at I swore haes a big sin apoon dir sowl. I juist said what da man said. I'm gotten nothin ta dü wi dat. Swearin indeed! I wisna bapteezed in dis Kirk

an broucht up under a gude minister ta staand an swear i da kirk. Na, if du wants swearin, du can go nearer hom. Hakie Ridlan is da lad fur dat." And Miss Elspeth, firmly grasping her umbrella in her right hand and holding up her "cots" with the left, set out for home with a determined and virtuous air, her bonnet plumes bravely waving in the morning breeze.

"Umph! Dir a dirl ipun Eppie noo. You'll not be able ta spaek till her, noo at shu's been afore da Paet Commission. I winder why dey seleked her," muttered Janny Betty, who "hooked in" to Laurina Williamina Shewardson, and who together tore the Peat Commission and incidentally Eppie to tatters on their homeward journey.

* * * * *

"I don't know what the Commission means to do," said the Tittie to the P. M., after tea in the Ha' of Gloup. "But I know what I mean to do."

"An what's dat, my jewel?"

"I'm going straight to Maggie. I have a letter here from Maggie which demands instant attention."

"Weel, can ye no write til her?"

"No, I can't do all that has to be done by writing. The fact is, Maggie doesn't exactly know what to do about her wedding, which comes off soon now. She rather inclines to a country wedding, though she is not very anxious about it; but Mr E. is rather averse to it. He says one is

enough, and he has been at one. Then she does not care to have the wedding in Lerwick, and neither does he. Then she has never been south; and in fact she doesn't know what to do. She needs somebody with her to advise her, and I'm going, peats or no peats, and more than that, Miss F. is coming with me. We can write up the notes to-night."

"I'm very gled ta hear it. Meggie haes nae near freends, ye ken, an shu haes a awfil notion o you, an onything at you'll advise, I'm sure shu'll du."

"Yes, and then, every girl needs girl friends about her when she is going to get married. There's so many things to be thought about, and got, and heaps of things to do."

"I suppose dey ir. Fur me, I juist got a new collar forby mi suit, an da thing wis don. I toucht nothin mair aboot it. Weemen is different."

"They are. They have some little sense about these things, which men certainly don't."

"Weemen haes certainly da sense ta tak a man whin dey get da shance. Bit, my dear at your ir, hoo ir ye goin ta get ta Meggie? Ye canna go bi laand, an ye canna flee?"

"That's for you to arrange. Men, with all the wisdom you say they have, should be able to get over any difficulty of that kind. We're going to-morrow, so I hope there will be no delay."

"Dear-a-dear! You're very tert wye da nicht. Du you ken, I dunna laek you sae weel when you're tert, an on your high horse. You're

no sae bonnie wi yon snurl in your broo."

"I can't help that. Woven have to be tert, as you call it, sometimes, when they are dealing with men. They have so little imagination. They cannot see farther than their noses, some of them. Women can see hundreds of miles away."

"Maybe. Heth, I tink da weemen is tertir wi ane anidder, as dir ir wi da men even, sometimes. Weel, aa I see fur it is, we'll hae ta wire fur da 'Earl' ta come up ta Westsawdwick an pit you across ta Nort Roe. Dat's da shortest sea journey you can get."

"For goodness' sake let us have as little of the sea as possible."

"Weel, you can get no less, aless ye go laek da Israelites across da Red Sea. Bit I doot we'll no get dat wye o traivllin don, even fur da Paet Commission or even fur Meggie. Na, da 'Earl' 'ill du. Shu'll pit you ower in twartree meenits. You wid harly hae time to be seek. Weel, I'll juist hae ta tak a motor again an rin ta Cullivoe an send aff a wire at wance. I'll juist tell da agent at Lerrick at dir bridal haste ipun it, an he'll hae ta tell da 'Earl's' folk ta slip everything an spank up da moarn's moarnin as fast as shu can go. I kno dis, at whin da crew o da 'Earl' kens at's ta pit you twa across ta Nort Roe, every sowl 'ill shovel on col ta mak her go; an if dey ken at's about Meggie's weddin, heth, I believe dey wid want ta come wi you ta Hillswick, ta see da bride. So, I'll go. I winder what da folk o Midbrak an Cullivoe is tinkin about aa dis rinnin about?"

"I'm not particularly caring what anyone is

thinking. 'What I'm thinking about is, that we have to get Maggie properly married, and that means a lot, I can tell you.'

"Shurly it does. I don't suppose at Meggie is in sic a birl hersell, as you." And the P. M. departed on his errand.

"So, da 'Earl' is ta be at Westsandwick at twal o'clock da day," he remarked at breakfast next morning. "I kent at dey wid slip everything, even a cargo o lambs, or da Yell Soound trip, ta tak you across six miles o waater. Of coorse, I'm not sayin at dir doin it fur nothin. Da 'Earl' haes ta live as weel as idder folk. Da expense 'ill juist go in amang da extrees—da miscellaneous, as some folk caas it. Very haandy wird dat; it covers a multitude o o—o———"

"Operations?"

"Dats da wird. Operations. Graand thing ta be eddicated. I winder what laek I wid a been hed I been eddicated?"

"Oh, you wouldn't have been half so nice, and certainly you wouldn't have had half as much sense—wit, as you call it."

"I don know. I micht a been a minister."

"No, you're far better as you are. Well, but this will never do. We must go and get ready. How long does it take to reach Westsandwick?"

"Oh, fae here we'll do it in about a oor. Da rods, you know, is sae splendid; splendid, did I say? Dat's not da wird. Dey pit me in mind more o a billard table—smooth an lovely; you never know you're in a motor, goin ta Mid Yell

or Westsandwick—shu juist glides along laek oil. Dat is wan thing at da Yell folk sees til—dey see at da Rod Brod keeps da rods in splendid oarder.”

“That’s one thing to be thankful for; we will have a very enjoyable run,” said the Tittie, as she left the room.

“You will dat in heth; if you’re no shakken ta bits afore you get there,” muttered Jerry, with an amused smile.

“Noo, since you ir goin,” he said shortly afterwards, addressing the Tittie in the motor, “tell Meggie fae me, an don’t you forget, at whar-ever da weddin is ta be, an whinever it comes aff, whedder dey howld it i da open on Roeness Hill, or Fitful Head, or da Hielans o Fladdabister; or whedder dey go ta Edinbury or London, yiss, or even til America or Africa,—every leevin wan belangin ta da Paet Commission is to be dere. Tell her, no maitter what we’re doin, we’ll leave all, slip all, an com til her weddin. For Meggie is a woman at deserves a man.”

“And what if Maggie and we take the wings of the morning and fly off to Lerwick, on the road to the south, to look out for our rewhirements, as you call them?”

“Weel, juist send wiz a telegram, an we’ll come ta any address ye gie. An will ye gie dis ta Meggie fae me. I don’t misdoot bit what Meggie, being a careful person, haes twartree stures laid by. Bit dir no end to what a wooman wants whin shu’s goin ta mairy. Da spaekin aboot it taks weeks, far less da gettin o it. An yon ’ill be a peerie beginnin fae her aald freend

Jerry. I widna say bit what we'll be clewin up fur da saeson very soon. We're got a lok o information, an we're hed wir holyday; an noo at Master E. is goin ta get mairried, afore he gets settled down an da report written, an lookid ower bi wiz, an printid, it 'ill be time ta present her ta Parliamint i da first o da next year. So we hae nothin perteeclar ta du i da meantime. We're been ower aa Yall, an held a sittin; an dat an what we fann oot in Nortmavine 'ill du fur wan report. So, see you aa aboot Meggie an her weddin. An blissins be wi you. Tak care o yoursells. What wid we du ithoot you?"

CHAPTER LXII.

The P. M. receives a long letter from the Tittie.

“ Heth, here’s a letter frae da Tittie. I wonder what shu’s tinkin aboot noo,” said Jerry three days after the events recorded in our last chapter. “ A braa big letter tu, so she most hae a lok ta say. So, whaar’s mi specs. Lat me see if I can get her read. I most say at da Tittie is no half sic a boanie writer as shu is hersell. Dat’s da blame what dey caa dis moodern eddication, you see. Da young canna write noo-a-days. I know wan thing—wance I du get a letter written (it taks me a oor ta pit doon twa pages) shu can be read, at ony rate. Good half text. Dat’s da maet I wis broucht up on. And don’t forget ta dot your i’s and strok your t’s. So. Here’s da first page. Dir some o dis weemen at writes heels ower head; you dont know hoo ta follow dem. You’re sure ta go ta da wrang page efter da first een.

“ Hillswick, Thursday.

“ My dear, dear friend,” (“ shu begins wi,”)
“ I have so much to say that I would really need to be beside you, for writing is very tedious. But

as I cannot, I will do the best I can to tell you all the news. In the first place, when we got to West-sandwick, the 'Earl' was there waiting for us, flags flying from every available spar (is that the word), and the whole crew, down to the cabin boy, whom I nearly fell in love with ("yae, yae, shu alwis haed a hert fur da boys,") dressed all in their best. They had launched one of the vessel's life-boats to take us off, and the crew that came ashore for us paid us the greatest respect. They couldn't have done more for royalty. ("I kent dat.") We were soon across at North Roe, after a pleasant passage, and were put ashore, again in the life-boat, at South Ha', where we also were met with the utmost respect and kindness. After a refreshing cup of tea, we stepped into the motor which was waiting, and were whirled along, as you would say, to Hillswick, in no time.

"I must say that it was with a little anxiety and even trepi—"what wurd is dis? Trep—da—? It canna be treppin? Shu widna be goin ta trepp wi Meggie. Shu hedna got til her. I see no dictionar aboot. Ugh! I'll juist du da sam' as da Yall man at wis readin a sermon i da kirk. Whin he cam till a big wurd at he couldna mak oot, he juist said at a big soup drap haed fa'en on her, an he couldna mak her oot. I'll juist du da sam, sort o wye. I'll lat her go. I tink I ken what shu means") that we approached Maggie's house, to which we had been directed. For you must understand that to a girl like Maggie, taking a man like Mr E. for a husband, such a step means a great deal of anxious thought, and I did not

know how the bride would be feeling. But there was no need for my fears. Maggie was just as quiet and sensible as ever ("of coorse, what else should she be?"), quite composed, and very, very glad that we had come to see her and talk matters over, and help in making all arrangements.

"Well, the upshot of the whole thing is, after a good deal—a great deal, in fact,—of talking and more talking, planning and re-planning, ("Yiss, dir been some taalk ower it, I know,") that Maggie is to be married in London. ("I juist toucht at shu wid laand dere.") She has had several letters from Mr E., all of which she showed us (for you can understand that Mr E. is not one of the billing and cooing sort—at least he doesn't put his feelings in his letters) and she and we could see, although he did not absolutely insist on it, that his wish was to be married in London. You see, he is city born and bred; and although he likes the country in a way, still his heart is where he was born and brought up. This really got over several difficulties. As I said before, Maggie did not know exactly what to do. She knew that Mr E. did not care either for a country wedding—he does not, I may tell you, altogether approve of the hilarity of a Shetland wedding, looking upon it more as a solemn service—or a wedding in Lerwick, which he and she both agreed was neither one thing nor another. Besides, a wedding in Lerwick complicated matters. He of course belongs to the English Church, and she is a strong Presbyterian; and on no account whatever would he hear of the ceremony being performed in a house.

Going to Edinburgh was almost as bad. Maggie has no friends there, and neither does he. So the end of the whole thing is, that they are to be married in London.

“Strange to say, Mr E., like Maggie, has no near relations. But he has several friends occupying good positions in London (I may tell you that Mr E. is a gentleman born, and has a very high reputation in London and far outside it as a writer), and naturally he wants the wedding to take place at St. George’s, Hanover Square. This, I may tell you, is the fashionable place in London. Maggie has no objection, and neither have we. Since the ceremony has to be in London, it may as well, she says, take place in St. George’s as any other place. (“Meggie’s soond sense again.”) It was all the same to her, she said. So Mr E. has made all arrangements by wire, and has obtained a special licence, and the wedding takes place this day fortnight. (“Lat’s see, dat’s Thursday. Heth, we’ll need aa wir time.”)

“Now, you dear old stupe, you will surely see from all this that we have our hands full, that we must hurry up, and be off at once. The motor is leaving for Lerwick to-morrow, and we three are going with it. We will travel by express to London, so as to have ten days there to get the wedding trousseau (“what is dat? Rewhirements, I suppose shu means. Fixins. Heth, dey’ll be a dirl ipun dem in London afore dey get everything dey want.”) The wedding dress is to be got from Robinson’s; and Selfridges, and I don’t know how many more first-class houses have

to be visited before everything is quite ready. ("Ready! You'll no be ready whin da bridegroom is being aksd ta pit on da ring. Ready! Umph! We'll see.") Mr E. has not yet decided whether the wedding breakfast shall be held in the Holborn Restaurant or the Savoy Hotel; but it will likely be in one or the other.

"Yesterday, several very handsome presents, including a cheque for £100 and another for £50, arrived for Maggie; for the announcement had appeared in the "Morning Post," the "Queen," and three more of the most fashionable papers in London. ("I assure you Meggie is don weel.") The wedding cake is to be a "stunner," and altogether we are looking forward to the time of our lives. The guests are to number 50—very select; that is, London guests, besides the Peat Commission. As you know, Mr E. is very fond of music, and for the breakfast he has engaged one of the best orchestras in London to play. So it will be all like a dream of beauty and enchantment. The music in the Church is enough to put a cold shiver down your back, it is so lovely ("I don know if I wid want a cowl'd shiver doon mi back at a weddin. I wid laek somethin mair warmly. 'Da Sodjers Joy,' or 'Merimachee,' or 'Kail an Knocked Corn,' is mair in my line. Bit dis Engleesh folk haes peculiar notions, you know—very.") Sir Somebody, I don't remember his name, is organist, and the singing of the choir of boys is just heavenly, I am told—they sing like angels. ("Weel, dats nateral anof. It wis a man at wis a angel first, an dir nae doot at men

keeps a kînd o a howld o what dey wir broucht up wi.")

"Now, I am writing this in good time to allow you to make all arrangements. You of course said that every member of the Commission would be at the wedding at all costs, which is only natural and right, for Maggie is a dear, good girl, and looked after us well at Hillswick. As a matter of course I assumed that you would wish Mrs Laurenson, Mary, and Johnnie to be there too, so I went to Eshaness yesterday and had a long talk with them on the subject. Your good wife, I could see, was pleased at the prospect of going to London, for she has never been farther south than Aberdeen; and I need not say that both Mary and her brother are overjoyed. Johnnie is just brimming over with delight. Mary is of course quieter and more sensible, like all girls ("nae doot"), but anyone can see that the idea of being in London and visiting all the grand shops and spending heaps of money ("na faer o dat") has almost 'clumpsed' her, as you would say, with joy. The mistress was more concerned about the expense than anything else. She said the cost would be a great deal, and so much had been spent already that she was afraid that Jerry could not hold out to it. However, I soon put her all right in regard to that. I first pointed out to her that it was man's highest privilege to earn money for women to spend ("weel, fur da preevilege, I know not; but fur da spendin, dir no a shadow o doot"); and I next impressed upon her the fact that in the Commission there was a Contingencies Fund

(" heth, shu's goin pretty fast, I tink ") for extra and unforeseen expenditure. Then I of course further informed her that it was your express wish that the whole Peat Commission should be at Maggie's wedding; and as the mistress and the bairns are a part of yourself, you would never dream of going without them. (" Weel, I tink you're goin a peerie bit ower far, my jewel. A man may hae a wife an bairns, bit dats not ta say at he's called ipun ta drag dem efter him ower da face o da glob every wye he goes. Faith, I know at Betty widna a cared ta còme ta Greenland wi me. At laest, I never heard her makin da offer. Of coorse, fleeterin aboot London is different frae harpoonin whaals in a open boat in Davis Straits. Weel, what can ye do? I know shu'll cost a boanie penny afore shu's don "). Then I also hinted—the idea just came into my head at the moment, to ease the mistress's feelings,—that very possibly the yacht would be sent north to take the Commission as far as Aberdeen, where they would get an express; so the actual journeying would cost you practically nothing. (" Dat's a good idee. Da Tittie haes sense, I see dat. Shu's learnin in a good school. Dats juist exackly what we'lli do "). So I came to figure it out that if you got to London, and were kept there, free of charge, and put home again, the only cost would be for what the bairns and their mother needed in the way of clothes. (" Juist so. Bit a person can spend money in claes, as I know.")

"The question of clothes may be rather a serious one. (" We're comin till it noo.") You

see, one cannot be among 'swells,' as they are called, without following their style, at least to some extent. Betty (I will just call her Betty; I like it better than any other name) will need two, perhaps three dresses, besides other little 'fixins,' as you elegantly term them; Mary will need nothing less, perhaps more; and Johnnie will need at least two new suits, besides a nice rainproof, overcoat, and other extras. ("Loard guide da woman, what is come ower her? Does shu tink I'm made o gold? What is the need fur aa dis?") Then of course you'll require a good deal yourself. At a fashionable wedding in London, you must be dressed in the very latest fashion and in the best style; and this is a matter I mean to take in hand myself. I couldn't trust you to do the thing properly, and as I wish it done. Men have no sense or taste about their appearance. Putting everything together, and reckoning on present prices, I think the whole will come to only about £8c. ("Eicghty pounds! Only eicghty pounds, mind you. Is da woman wise?") So to make things comfortable, I was thinking, you needn't put less than £150 in your pocket when you leave for London—or better, say £200; for London is a big place, and there's lots of things to see, and money there goes like water through a seive. But a couple of hundred pounds is nothing to one of His Majesty's Commissioners. As you who know the Scriptures so thoroughly, are well aware, no man liveth unto himself—especially if he is a married man. ("Dat is da wirds o truth.")

"You see what a lot I have had to do, and

think about, and plan! And our arrangements are only beginning to take shape. I will be so busy now that I will have hardly time to take any food. But seeing it is all for Maggie, neither I nor Miss G., grudge the time spent—in fact we rather enjoy it, and enjoy telling you poor men what to do and how to do it, for in these matters you are all as helpless as infants.

“Now, when you answer this, which you must do immediately, for there is no time to waste—don’t sit down and write. Just ask one of the reporters to come to your room, and speak to him as if you were speaking to me. Give all your ideas and opinions expression. He will take everything down in shorthand, type it out, and send it to me by next post certain. Then you will please wire when we may expect the yacht—if you approve of that suggestion—so as to be ready. There is no time to be lost. Either the yacht or some other steamer will have to be north within the next three days to take us away, so the correspondence will have to be conducted by wire. There’s a great deal to see about—things you don’t have the slightest idea of; and peats or no peats, the wedding has to come off on the date fixed; and more than that, we must all be at it.

“This is a very long letter, but you see there is so much to say and do in a case of this kind that I could not make it shorter.

“Take care of yourself, for the sake of every one, and especially for the sake of your own

TITTIE.”

“Weel, dir wan thing I must du. Efter

reading dat I must hae a smok. I see nae idder means o comfort aboot, an laekly dir non ta be hed. So a smok I most an will hae. Bairns, what ir we comin til? What ir we comin til? Me, a owld sensible man, spendin twa hunder pound on anidder man's weddin! Mi nown een didna cost me more as twa hunder shillins, an feth, da folk aa toucht at I did weel. Twa hunder pound! Dis weemen! Gie dem wan inch, and dey'll tak a ell. A ell? Twinty faddoms is more laek it. Noo, da Tittie is a fine ting o lass; I'll say dat. A fine wye wi her; an boannie, an sensible, an kind. Bit shu's horrid expensive. Da man at shu taks 'ill need ta hae a lok o money. Shu laeks ta hae things richt, ye see, every wye, an plenty of it. Dat's richt anof; bit it can't be don ipun nothin. Every time it costs money. An dan it maun be de best, an dat costs more. Non o your tippence ha'pny things ill du fur da Tittie. Look what shu led me intil in Lerrick. An noo Betty an da twa bairns. I'll wager tippence at da tree wid a geen ta London juist wi dir best claes, hed it no been fur dis idee o da Tittie's. Betty's new tippet an yon aigrette thing looked splendid, I'm shure, forby da pearl brooch; an as fur Mary, da lasses aa said at dir wisna wan at cam oot o da Kirk better pitten on. Bit shu's wance pitten evil i dir minds, an da thing is don. Fur Joannie an mesell, we'll see. We'll get less. Bit ta da weddin we'll hiv ta go."

"Hillo, you're looking rather solemn, sitting here, smoking all by yourself," said Mr D., entering the room.

" I'm baith lookin an feelin it."

" What's up?"

" You don't hae a wife an bairns?"

" No, I don't."

" Well, dan, don't do it."

" Don't do it. I thought you were always advising everyone to marry, and saying that was man's proper and natural state."

" Yiss, so it is sometimes, bit not alwis."

" Well, you can't have it both ways."

" I winder if Solomon hed it baith wyes. I winder if he was bound, as you wid say, ta pervide an cled yon baand o weemen he keepid about him?"

" Oh, it's money again, is it? I see. My dear sir, I thought you had come to the time of life when you realised that money has no value unless it is spent. It's made round, and round it has to go."

" Yiss, bit ta spend twa hunder pound ipun anidder man's weddin is a aafil thing ta du."

" Two hundred pounds! Is that all? For four of you, for I understand that you and the mistress and the children are all going to the wedding. Why, I reckon I will spend a hundred pounds at least on myself. London is an expensive place. Besides, consider the pleasure you will get in the finest city in the world for such a sum. Why, the memory of it will follow you all your days."

" Yiss, bit a memory 'ill not feed you; an whin da money is gon, its gon. You canna get it back."

" That's true in a way. But you have got

the value of it. I always thought you laid great stress on the things of the spirit, the mind. It's the spirit, and all the things the mind clothes itself with, that bears a man up. Otherwise you might as well be one of the lower animals."

"Dat's aa true anof in a wye. Bit I don know. Of coorse if you need ta spend a hunder on yoursell, twa hunder fur fower is kind o chaep. Bit I did not reckon on sic a ootlay as dis. Hooever, since da job is to be jobbid, we'll juist hae ta get troo as weel as we can. I'll hae ta go an see da Chairman an da rest o dem aboot da whole affair—da yacht, an da train, an aa da rest o it. We'll hae ta look slippy, becaas I assure you, wance dis weemen gets dir heads intil a weddin, dir nedder fur haadin or bindin."

CHAPTER LXIII.

The Commission comes to Lerwick. The Tittie gives the P.M. further details regarding the wedding.

Three days afterwards the yacht lay off the Manse of Cullivoe. She had come north under official orders to take the Peat Commissioners to Aberdeen, the first stage of their journey to London to be present at the great event of the season, Meggie's marriage to Mr E. Now that the time had arrived for their departure, with one accord the Commissioners agreed that they were sorry they were leaving the island of peat so soon. During the short time they had been there, time had passed very pleasantly. They had played golf on Papil Ness and at the same time seen whales disporting themselves in the tide-tossed sea of Blue Mull Sound, which, lying almost at their feet, on a fine night was a picture never to be forgotten; they had negotiated and fished Gloup Voe, and heard many stories of the cruel, relentless sea and of the brave fight for their lives at that wild place of hapless, despairing men; they had been at Mid-brake, that old-world spot that looks straight out on the northern seas, most of it little changed since the days when the Norse rovers came across to see what Shetland was like; they had moved among

the kindly people of Cullivoe; been twice at service in the church; had held a sitting; been at Gutcher, both by sea and land; at Westsandwick, where they visited and explored the old mansion house; had spent some time at Mid Yell, where they met several interesting personalities; had been at East Yell, West Yell, and Ulsta. They had been at the ancient toon of Burravoe, and learned that law courts were wont to be held there; they had, in fact, "done" the island pretty thoroughly, in respect of boating, fishing, shooting, golfing and motoring. In the pleasant weather the experience had been a delight, because everything was different to what was to be seen in the south. Hence their regret at leaving.

After an uneventful but pleasant run, the yacht reached Lerwick in the afternoon, where the party landed, one set going to the Grand and the other to the Queen's as before.

"Da Tittie an da high-heeler, an Betty an da bairns, not ta mention Meggie, is been in Lerrick fur twinty-fower oors, fae what shu said in her letter, an nae doot dir been haein a look aroond. I widna care if da weemen wid be satisfeed wi lookin. Bit dir not. Da lookin is only da beginnin ta haein. I tink a law sood be brought oot ta stop dis shopkeepers at daels in weemens fixin's pittin aa yon things i dir windows. It only temps da objects. If dey never saw dem, dey wid never tink aboot dem."

"I say, Mr Laurenson," said the imp, "do you think there is any chance of you and I having a game of billiards before we leave Shetland? You

haven't potted that red ball yet, you know."

"Boy, be whiet wi dee. Wha is tinkin o billards een noo?"

"Here you are," said the Tittie, who met the party at the door, charmingly dressed, and looking as neat as a fiddle.

"Yiss, here we ir, an here ir you. Been at the shops again, I see. Yon's a new bloose ye hae on. I ken yon cost twartree pennies. Whin did you buy yon een?"

"Never you mind when I bought it or what I paid for it. The whole point is, it's pretty. Come you upstairs, and see what you think of Mary's one, and Betty's, for she's got one too, and Madam one also."

"I tink da Lerrick shopkeepers 'ill miss you whin you go. Dat's wan thing."

"Now, go and get your hair brushed and that great beard of yours put into shape, and then come and join us with the rest, at tea. I have heaps of things to tell you. If you say one word, or give a wrong look to Betty or Mary about their new blouses, I'll never speak to you more. Your function is to admire, pay, and be thankful it is not more."

"So, I suppose it 'ill aa come til a end some time," muttered Jerry to himself, as he carried out the behests of the Tittie. "We'll juist hae ta yaggle troo it aa as weel as we can."

"I forgot to tell you in my letter," said the Tittie, after tea, "that there are to be four bridesmaids at the wedding."

"Fower best maids! Da man 'ill harly ken wha da bride is amung dem aa."

"No fear. There's a friend of Mr E.'s, a Miss Earnshaw and Miss F., and Mary and myself."

"Weel, I hoop Meggie 'ill be weel lookid efter."

"We have not decided yet what we are to wear—that will depend upon the fashions in London to a large extent; but of course we are all dressed alike, you know."

"Dan da bridegroom will hae a shance o spyin Meggie oot amung da five o you. Shu'll be a different colour fae you, laekly, maybe maave; an you'll laekly be crimson. I tink Betty mairied in maave; bit I canna mind noo; its sae lang ago."

"You are a stupid. Every bride now-a-days marries in white, the emblem of innocence."

"Juist so."

"And the bridesmaids select a style and colour for themselves."

"Weel, if dir ta be fower o you selectin different pieces o stuff ta du fur da lot, Heeven help da man or da women at haes ta plaese you. Dey'll never get hom dat night. Wan 'ill want blue, anidder majenta, da tidder een 'ill swear bi yallow, da next een 'ill want red. Hoo ir ye goin ta fix dat up? Its not in women ta du it. Twa canna 'gree, far less fower."

"No fear we'll agree all right. For my part, I'll have a nice fawn colour."

"Dere you go. An I ken at Mary's taste is

more majenta, an da high-heeler I wid tak ta be sky blue. I tink if you're wise, ye wid laeve it ta me."

"An what colour would you select?"

"Weel, I tink a very good colour wid be da colour o a boat's barkid sail, you know, efter aboot five year at sea—a kind o a dirty broon, ye ken. Dat wid be what ye wid caa kind o neutral, whiet, an respectable. A colour laek dat, you see, wid suit every wan. It wid juist shaw up your complexion, an what da photographer caas tone doon da high-heeler's, an set aff Mary's. So I don't know what more you want. Bit I assure you, aless you laeve it til a man ta decide, da weddin 'ill not come aff in six monts."

"Pouff! for the men. If we do get hopelessly stranded, and cannot come to a decision, we will call you in. Then, the bridegroom has to give each of us a handsome present."

"Poor sowl at he is! He doesna ken yet what he's yokkid himsell til. Meggie 'ill be da laest o it, fur shu's a moaderat person. Yiss, an what kind o a present are you expectin?"

"We certainly look for nothing less than a ten-guinea gold bracelet?"

"To every wan o you?"

"You don't suppose that one bracelet could do for four girls, do you?"

"No, not very weel, bit—Woman, dat's forty pound, fur wan eetim, as da man said."

"Well, suppose it is. What's forty pounds to a man in Mr E.'s position?"

"What wis da caall fur dis fower bestmaids?"

It only piles up expense ipu da poor man."

"It looks better; there's more style with it; and it reads better in the press notices. You're not aware, perhaps, that Mr E. paid ten guineas for the preliminary announcements of the marriage in the fashionable journals?"

"No, I don't; an aa at I hae ta say ta dat is, at a fule an his money is shune pairted. Da on-ly announcement o my weddin at ever I heard o wis da lines fae da Session Clerk—cost a shillin, I tink. Betty held on ta dem, an howlds on yet, sae far as I ken. You'll hae da man ruined, afore you're don wi him."

"No fear. He knows what he's about. When in Rome, you know, you must do as the Romans do."

"An whin in Eshaness, I suppose, ye du as da Eshaness folk does."

"Certainly. I know that he reckons on spending five hundred pounds on the wedding."

"Weel, better him as me. Dat's all I hae ta say."

"Maggie's things are costing us a good deal of anxiety, do you know?"

"Oh. Hoo is dat?"

"Maggie, you see, thought she could not go beyond ten pounds for all her wedding needs—"

"Heth, I tink its plenty."

"But of course we pointed out to her that such a sum was utterly ridiculous. It wouldn't buy her wedding dress alone, besides the hundred and one other things she absolutely requires. One

cannot get married in Hanover Square, London, on nothing."

"No, faith, dey can not. Dat's sure, if you're about."

"So we had to induce her to break in upon her savings, and lay aside at least another forty pounds."

"Loard forgive you, fur I will not. I know it 'ill go hard against Meggie's grain to heave away sae muckle gude money, even for a man; fur shu's been brought up ta sense an care."

"Well, if we can get Maggie decently put by for fifty pounds, we'll do exceedingly well. That's what I'm telling you. You have no idea what an expensive place London is. I was there once, and I could have spent hundreds, and the visit was half spoiled because I did not have anything like the money I wanted."

"Do you know at you're an aafil woman. I raelly widna a toucht it o you. If you're laek dis whin you're young, what laek will ye be whin you're owld? As da Scriptir says, if dis is da fruits o da green tree, what will dey be i da dry? I'm juist very gled at I'm ower aald ta mairy you mesell, an fur him at gets you—"

"Oh, never mind him at this time. We are out just now for a 'ripping fun,' as the boys say, and we're going to have it. Mr E. is going to have the time of his life, and so are we. We're going to shake him up, I can tell you. He's got off far too long, and we'll make him pay for it now. He has been star-gazing and book-worming all his life; we'll bring him down to something real and

hard and practical. Life doesn't consist in stargazing and theorising."

"It does not. Do you know this is the second time I'm been kind o frightened fur you, an I'm gettin raelly anxeeous aboot da poor man. Da mercy is, he's no mairyin you. It's Meggie he's takin, an Meggie is not been broucht up in yon wild wy'es. Shu's been practical, I can tell you. Meggie haes more practicalness in her peerie finger as da whole baand o you pitten tagedder, I can tell you. Shu haes da sense at practicableness brings an maks—yiss, maks—at can du her an him an aa dir faimly, if dey hae ony, aa dir lives."

"Oh, we know all Maggie's good points. But Maggie has her limitations. She needs a good deal of poking up too. She's got to realise that she is to be something different to what she's been; that she is to take up a new position in life, and adapt herself to it. She has not now to ponder and consider whether she can afford to put three eggs in the pudding, or whether she can scrape along with two. If the pudding needs three eggs, three it has to get, three, or four, if that can make it better. And everything the same way. Maggie is not going to wear the one hat or bonnet for two years, and the same costume for three. Maggie is to be shown what to do to keep up her position, and how to do it."

"Weel, heth, dir wan thing sure. If shu gets you fur a schulemistress, shu'll not want fur teachin. Bit, tak you my wurd fur it, Meggie 'ill no mak a fule o hersell. Shu'll be as moaderat an as sensible in her new place as shu's been i da

owld. Fur don't you see, Meggie haes naeteril sense, wit. Shu can take da size o a person, juist as weel as anidder. An shu'll sail alang as cool an collected amung aa da folk in London as shu did amung da folk in Hillswick. Shu'll shune be able ta pit on da coarn o veneer at some o dis folk caa menners, alto fur da menners o some o dem, raelly I'll say nothin. An shu'll know whin ta howld her tongue an whin ta lat her go. Fur extravagance in dress an style, ye needna try ta pit it in her, fur its not in Meggie ta do it. Bit I tink, do you know, its time fur me ta geng an hae twar-tree wirds wi Meggie hersell. I see at Mester E. is juist left her. He's laekly geen ta write up some o da report. Laekly da romance pairt o it. Da yaacht is sailin at eicht o'clock, an we'll hae ta be gettin reddy."

"Don't you go to Maggie with any of your old-fashioned notions, and speak of majenta wedding dresses, and nonsense of that kind."

"My jewel at you ir, Jirry, laek Meggie, kens whin ta howld his tongue."

"Weel, Meggie, da blod is nearly i da bucket noo. What's doo tinkin noo?"

"Tinkin? What sood I be tinkin? I'm no da first woman at's mairied a man."

"No, an du'll not be da last. At laest, I hop not. Dis is goin ta be a graand weddin. Wir bits o ploys i da country here is nothin til it."

"Da graander is not o my seekin. Bit Mester—"

"Mester? Du's no mesterin him yet, is du? Does da man no hae a name?"

"Yae, he haes a name."

"Weel, what is it?"

"Arthur."

"Dat's a boanie name. We caa it Erty, bit of coorse du wid never du da laek o dat. Weel, du says at Mr Arthur—What's his idder name?"

"Silvester."

"Oh! A boanie name tu. Weel, at Mr Silvester wanted ta get mairred in London. Weel, if a man canna say whaar he's ta be mairried, an hoo, an whin, da Loard peety him. Du juist shawed dy good, soound sense ta agree wi him. An I kno fae what du kens o da Scriptirs, at du'll follow Paal's advice aa dee life, an alwis obey dee husband."

"Paal wis never mairried at I ken o, an dats laekly why he wis sae free in gein advice ta idder folk."

"Weel, we don't know; bit I wid redder incline ta tink at du's richt, baith wi da wan thing an da idder. I'm generly funn at da folk at's maist free in giein advice haes da laest caal ta do it. Bit I tink dis aboot dee, an I'm sayin it ta dee face,—I believe at du'll mak a whiet, respectable, sensible, iedent, trifty wife. An more as dat, I believe du'll pit some practical sense inta da man, fur, as du kens as weel as me, da most o dis leetry men kens very little aboot what's goin on under dir very noses. Dey tink dey du, oh, yae! Bit, less-a-less! Noo, Meggie, I'm not goin ta sit here an gie dee advice. I'm ower aald fur dat. Bit dir wan piece o advice I will gie dee, an dat is, ta go an cled deesell an mak ready ta

laeve, fur da yaacht sails at eicht o'clock, an he's noo a wharter past seeven. Get da rest o da weemen set in motion, fur Loard's sake. Dir some o dem laek a owld man-o-war—horrid slow ta get under wye. Aff du goes. I winder if I could meet dat boy fur twartree meenits i da billard room. I'm ready. Nothin ta du bit ta pit on mi hat an mi cot. We could hae a half a oor ta wirsells weel anof."

CHAPTER LXIV.

The Commission arrives in London, and puts up at the Carlton Hotel.

"Oh, yes, here you are, of course, as usual," exclaimed the Tittie, who with Betty, Mary, the high-heeler, Maggie, and Joanie, entered the billiard room. "We've been hunting for you for the last ten minutes all over the place. You were in such a state to be off that we of course thought you would be sitting waiting for us in the Commercial Room. But it was really stupid to think that. For my experience of men is, one should look for them where they should not be, not where any reasonable person would expect to find them."

"Weel, your experience is no very great yet, my jewel," replied the P.M., chalking his cue. "Wait till you're seventy. Bi dat time you'll be able ta spaek. You'll maybe ken sae muckle at you'll say nothin. I wis juist tryin ta get dis red baa i da hol. Tweetie-shee him; he will not go. An yet da boy here dads him in every noo an dan wi a bang fit ta raise da dead."

"I'm not surprised at that. Most men are stupid. What do you want? Do you want that red ball put in the pocket there?"

"Yae; dat's da idee."

“Let me see the cue.”

Taking the cue as if she knew how to handle it, and laying her hand on the table like a connoisseur, the Tittie, after careful aim, pocketed the red with a nice little smack. “You see how easily women can do things, especially anything demanding neatness. Men are so clumsy, and big, and awkward, that except for one here and there, they can do nothing with neatness and grace.”

“We hear you. Heth, yon wis a good shot, though. Will ye hae a game?”

“No, I will not. The wedding is far more important than a game of billiards, I can tell you. Come away. We must be off. The boat has been waiting for half-an-hour. You men are quite hopeless once you get into a billiard room.”

“Da funny thing aboot da weemen is, alto men is sae stoopid, an clumsy, an big, an witless, as dey say, dir never at rest intil dey get a howld o wan.”

“That’s just because we don’t like to see them going blundering over precipices and getting lost. We take a hold of men for their good, to look after the helpless animals, to put some polish on them, and a little sense into them. But come away for goodness’ sake.”

“Dear when! fur dis men,” said Betty. “Owld sensible men staanding playin demsells wi bits o sticks an baas, laek bairns. Raelly, raelly!” And Betty went out of the room, her sighs being more expressive than volumes of words.

“I wid laekid till a pitten in dat red baa. I

don't laek ta be baet, you know. Mellishin on da thing. I'm tried it a lok o times noo. I suppose it 'ill juist be wan o da things I canna do. Wan person canna du everything in dis world. Dir some things aesy fur some folk, an idders at dey canna do. So. I suppose we'll hae ta be goin."

In a short time afterwards the party were all aboard the yacht, which did not take many minutes to get under weigh; and 16 hours after Lerwick was left, Aberdeen was reached. Here all made a brief stay—all except Mr Silvester, who took the first train to London, to make the necessary arrangements on the spot. Joanie thought that Aberdeen must contain all the houses in the world, for although Lerwick looked big in comparison with the toon of Ure, Eshaness, Aberdeen dwarfed it completely, in his view. An hour or two's knocking about the city made them all ready for luncheon and a rest, and after this refreshment they took train for the metropolis, travelling first-class, of course, all the way. Being an express, stoppages were few, and at some places where the train came to a standstill, at any rate, those who saw the smoke-begrimed industrial towns and cities for the first time were not favourably impressed.

"Less-a-less!" said Betty, "fur folk ta live amung aa dis smok an dirt. We're poor, bit we're paecable, as da wife said, an we hae fresh air, at ony rate, an we're free o dirt."

They all greatly enjoyed the beautiful scenery through which they too quickly passed, however—the long stretches of corn and meadow land, the trees, the trim little cottages dotted every here and

there, the old-world cities, the forests they skirted, the seeming comfort and well-to-do aspect of it all. Punctual to a minute, the train brought up at Euston station, Betty, Mary, Joanie, and in a less degree Maggie, wondering if they would ever get out of this babel and roar of confusion alive. Betty, it must be confessed, was somewhat frightened, and devoutly wished that she was safe at home at her own fireside at Eshaness. Having, however, undertaken the adventure, she resolved to go through everything to the end, and calmed herself and quietly awaited events.

"Here we are now; here are our taxies," said the Chairman. "We are all going to the Carlton, where rooms have been engaged. We'll be there in a trice, and in a short time you'll all be feeling quite at home in this great city."

To the end of her days, Betty wondered how the people of London are not smashed or killed in thousands every day. The journey from the station to the hotel held her speechless. The vast number of people on the streets; the thousand and one taxies, buses, cycles, and other vehicles mixed up, as she thought, in inextricable confusion, yet all careering along at high speed, made her gasp and think the last day had surely come. How they all got through that maze of streets without accident she never did and never could understand—the whole experience lay on her mind like a nightmare. Maggie, Mary, and Johnnie were mightily impressed in much the same way.

"Here we are," said Mr D. "Here's the Carlton, and here's the manager at the door wait-

ing to receive us. Very good of him, indeed, for he does not usually come out to meet visitors."

"Weel, bit dan, you see, its not every day at da Paet Commission comes along," said the P.M., with a smile.

"That's true," said the Chairman. "The waiters will show us all to our bedrooms, and after a brush up we will meet in our own sitting-room, where we will have lunch."

As each was ushered into his or her bedroom by the four waiters who were in attendance, Master John, Miss Mary, Miss Margaret, as he and they were addressed, hardly knew whether they were waking or sleeping. And as they and Betty on entering their splendidly-furnished rooms found their portmanteaus unstrapped and everything made ready for them as if they were the pick of the aristocracy, they had a strong desire to take the wings of the morning and flee away to humbler surroundings. This, however, being impossible, they set themselves to make the best of things and not appear too rustic. The magnificence of the whole place, the richness of the furnishings and furniture, the strangeness and novelty of it all, fell on them almost like a pall, and they were feeling at anything but ease until the Tittie and the high-heeler, who were more accustomed to these things, came on the scene.

"Oh, here you are, Maggie. I've been looking for you. Where is Johnnie?"

"I tink he's i' da next room. Fur da graandir o dis place!"

Joanie, hearing his name mentioned, ventured out, and came up to the Tittie.

"Oh, here you are. Here we all are. Now, let me see if you are all presentable before we go down to lunch. Johnnie, your collar is all awry, and your hands are not too clean. Maggie, your skirt is down at one side. Mary, I'm surprised at you. Your blouse is not sitting well at all, and your hair might be decidedly tidier. The only one right among you is Mrs Laurenson. Now, there, that will do. You're more presentable than you were, and I think we can go. I'll sit next to Johnnie. Now, I juist wish to tell you all, when the waiter comes and asks whether you will have turtle soup or ox-tail, or clear, or brown soup, don't answer just at once. Hesitate a moment, and consider, and then say, quite decidedly, 'clear,' or 'turtle,' whichever you choose. And the same with all the other eight courses."

"Eicht diets?" asked Betty. "Dir shurly no expectin wiz ta tak eicht different things, ir dey?"

"That they are. This is only a light luncheon, you know; wait till you come to dinner at eight o'clock. Then, speak all the time. Don't sit dumb. There's heaps of things to speak about, and the meal should go on just as if we were at home. Keep your eyes open. And, Johnnie, don't eat too much of any dish. A little of everything. And don't gaze too much about you."

As Betty "took in" the furnishings of the richly-equipped room into which they entered, she could not help making a mental contrast between

it and her abode in Eshaness. The chiffonier, the settee, and all the things that had been got for the new house seemed mean and contemptible in comparison. And if Jerry was struck with the "whantity of knives an forks an spunes" on the dining-table of the Grand Hotel, Lerwick, he was almost overpowered—although he took good care not to show it—at the gleaming mass of cutlery, silver ornaments, and flowers which met his eye on the dining table in the Carlton, London. The manner in which the Chairman and other members of the Commission, however, took everything as a matter of course and talked as if they were at the hotel at Hillswick, soon put those less accustomed to these grand surroundings at their ease, and the meal was partaken of without any evidence of fluster, or without the committing of any breach of etiquette on the part of any one. Indeed, the home party, as they might be called, were agreeably surprised to find, largely through the attention and tact of the waiters, that they not only managed to act with proper decorum, but took a portion of the many dishes provided without feeling anything the worse.

"Now, Miss Margaret," said the Chairman at the close of the meal, "what are your plans for the afternoon? We wait upon you, you know. You command; we obey."

"Maggie and we," replied the Tittie, "are going to have a quiet afternoon to ourselves in the drawing - room. We need a rest; and we need peace, with no men about, to discuss a hundred and one things and make our plans."

“Oh, we sall gie you paece. Aa at I want is a place whaar I can hae a smok, an get a coarn o somethin ta drink Meggie’s helt. Meggie ’ill better tak as muckle paece noo, as lang as shu can get it, fur shu’ll laekly hae very little efter shu’s teddered. Dir shurly a room whaar dey can smok?”

“No fear of that. Probably half-a-dozen,” said Mr D. “You ladies will hardly need the whole afternoon and evening entirely to yourselves? You will surely favour us with your company to the theatre, or the pictures, or some place of entertainment?”

“Thank you, we may. If, as Mr Laurenson says, we are in the lüde for it, we might give you the pleasure of our company. We will see. Meantime you can go and puff away smoke to your hearts’ content. We have heavier matters to think about.”

“I tell you what it is,” said the P. M., after he had found a comfortable chair in the smoke-room and had got his pipe well under weigh, “dis weemen, wance dey jokkid intil a wedding, gets a air ipu dem at could du fur da Wheen o Sheeba. Dey can think about nothin else. Dir a dirl an a birl ipu dem at’s nedder moaderate or aesy. An it taks about a mont efter its aa ower afore dey settle doon.”

“I thought you were greatly interested in Miss Maggie’s wedding too?” said Mr C.

“Interested? So I im. Bit I’m not goin oot o mi head ower it. I’m goin til a theaatre da nicht, at ony rate, whedder da weemen comes or

no. Or I winder if dir ony circus things haandy? I laek dem fine. I mind bein at wan in Cardiff, an do you know I enjoyed dat parteeklar. Da wye at yon lasses jumps ipu da horses' backs oot o a gird, an up an doon, an da wye da men kerry on wi dis an dat, is raelly very clever. I laek ta see clever things. An dan yon clown bodies; dey wid mak a horse laugh. I tink at Joanie an me 'ill go ta wan o dem, an laeve da weemen ta dem-sells. Dey dunna care sae muckle fur dat kind o things; dir more fur show an dress, you know."

* * * * *

A very pleasant time was spent in London. The ladies filled up most of each forenoon, and a part of every afternoon, for a week, with fashionable dressmakers and milliners; and between fitting and trying on and altering, had quite enough to engage their attention, and wanted nothing better. Among it all the Tittie did not neglect her friend the P.M. and her protege Joanie, in the matter of dress. She insisted on taking both to good tailors and had them "rigged out" in a style and quality befitting the place where they were staying and the function they were to attend. The groans with which the P.M. "planked doon a most gudeless sum o money" for these vestments troubled her not one whit. The thing had to be done properly, she said. "It's aesy fur her ta spaek," he said, "shu dusna hae ta pey."

Sight-seeing, nightly visits to the theatres, picture houses, and other places of amusement,

filled up the time, which passed all too quickly. The Tower of London, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, and many other places of historic interest, were in turn visited, the Chairman and Mr D. acting as guides, philosophers, and friends. To them, who knew their London by heart, the party were indebted for much information of great interest regarding the places visited. Betty, however, was more concerned about Joanie than all the great sights to be seen. If once she lost sight of him, or when he was away with the gentlemen alone on their peregrinations, she could not rest. "Da bairn is bein killed amung aa da evil o dis place. Wha could live here? Wance outside, you don't hae time ta draw your breath. An dan dis men hae nae wit or sense o lookin efter a bairn—non. If it wisna fur dir midders, what wid come o dem?" As Joanie, however, had the faculty of turning up whole and well at every meal and every night; and moreover, after the first three days talked about going to the Strand, or Piccadilly, or the Embankment, or the Palace Theatre, or the Coliseum, as if he were a Londoner, his mother's fears gradually subsided, and she felt a little more at ease, but only a little. Betty's anxiety was to get the thing over and get home as fast as she could. Joanie did not tell her, nor did Jerry, nor did the imp, that one fine afternoon the two youths gave their seniors the slip—at the instigation of the imp, it must be confessed—and after having a "ripping time" got hopelessly lost. Jerry was in a tirry-mirry, actually sweating with fear and apprehen-

sion; for he knew if he appeared at the hotel without his Benjamin, all the weddings in the world could wait, so far as Betty was concerned, until he was found. Fortunately, the boys had the sense to ask a policeman to direct them to the Carlton Hotel, in the precincts of which the P. M. had taken up his stand in the hope that they would make for that objective, if no harm had befallen them. The P. M. vowed that after this, never more would he slip Joanie's hand when out without his mother.

Betty did not care much for the theatres. Much of what she saw shocked her sense of decency, and some of the plays she considered far-fetched and silly. The people in the theatres, however, were a source of never-failing interest, and while in one she would sit almost all the time looking at the crowd of well-dressed, well-groomed, well-to-do men and women that filled every seat wherever she went. The music-halls pleased her better, for there was more variety, more to please, something nearer her grasp, than was to be found in the ordinary theatre. One morning they all went to a special service in Westminster Abbey. This she never forgot. The beautiful singing and the rich-toned organ brought tears to her eyes, and she could have sat all day drinking it all in. Another delight to both her and Mary was a choral and orchestral concert. The massed voices and heavenly orchestra, the lovely voices of the soloists, and the precision and finish with which everything was performed, filled them both with pure joy.

"Kind o tedisome wye wi it," said the P. M.

after this performance. "Ower little variety, I tink. Bit fine, fine; dir nae doot about dat. An heth, dey can du dir wark, dis folk. Oh yiss. Dey don't come bumblin in wan efter da idder as I'm heard in some places. Man, you can't see daylight atween dem. An do you know at yon nigger thing at I wis at da streen wis parteeklar good too. I leuch till I wis sore at da antics o dat baand. Fine voices da men hed, fine, too; an dey could sing laek linties, could dey no. Weel, weel, we're hed a graand time in London, sae far, at ony rate."

* * * * *

"All is prepared. Everything is ready," said the Tittie one evening at dinner. "Down to the last button on Maggie's satin shoes, nothing is omitted. The dresses have been tried on and viewed at every angle, and found satisfactory; the hats have been described as a dream of beauty; the presents to the bridesmaids have been declared to be perfect. So nothing is wanting. The great event takes place to-morrow at eleven o'clock in Hanover Square Church. Rehearsals of the ceremony have been held; the taxies ordered; the wedding breakfast arranged for; everything, in fact, down to the smallest detail. So we will need all to be up before we waken to-morrow morning, to be in time."

"Has Mr Silvester gotten da ring yet?" asked the P. M.

"Goodness gracious! That was the only

thing he was worrying about. He could not get one exactly to suit him, and it had to be specially made. I will have to go and see him about that immediately."

"I tink you better du. Meggie canna mairy ithoot a ring, mair as ony idder woman. I toucht dey wid be something no ready. Heth, I know I hed my ring boucht an in mi possession twa weeks afore. Betty saw ta dat. Weel, shu will be a day da moarn, shurely. Bit dey'll be no 'Kail an Knockid Coarn' at her, sae muckle as da peety."

CHAPTER LXV.

Maggie's Wedding.

“Da Day o Days,” though consecrated to a different purpose than the famous one in the peat hill which has already been described, dawned, “kind o seekly,” as Jerry, who was up early, put it. The sun shone, but it seemed unable to pierce the thick atmosphere that hung over the great city, “more laek soup as onything else. Of coorse da folk canna expec ta get wadder in a place laek dis. Da only place at you can get raelly fresh air is in Shetland, parteeklarly at Eshaness. Hooever, I don’t expec its troublin Meggie’s sowl wan whit. Shu’s goin ta get mairied. Dat’s da main thing. Shu’ll tink aboot da wadder efter. Heth, I’ll geng doon an see if I can hae a smok some wye afore braakwast. A braakwast smok is alwis very fine. Noo, dis will be a day, shurly. Da Tittie is in a pipperation, an Betty is kind o excited; da high-heeler is uplifted; Mary is speechless; Joanie is clumpsed; da baand is oot o dir heads, an Mr E. doesna ken whedder he’s waalkin on da ert or i da clouds. Even da manager an da servants o da hotel is in a dirl. I don’t know what’s up wi da folk. Meggie is not da first woman at’s been mairied, or Mr E. eddern. Of

coorse its da first time dir been mairied, dat is true. An dir juist laek a new wife wi her first bairn. Ta see dat an hear it goin on, you wid tink at dey wir never a infant born i da world afore, shu's sae prood. Bit, ye see, its da first bairn at shu's hed, so you hae ta excuse her. I'm noticed, myself, at whin it comes ta da ninth or tenth een, shu's no sae uplifted, alto in wan wye shu ought ta be prooder. So. Man haes little here below, dat is true; bit as lang as dir a coarn o baccy ipu da face o da ert, he can wrastle troo. Dere's yon drum thing kickin up a row. I suppose I'll hae ta go. Brakwast is ready; da victuals is up, as da man said."

"Mr Laurenson, we thought we had lost you," said the Chairman. "Have you been out enjoying this beautiful morning, with the sun shining gloriously for Miss Margaret's wedding?"

"I wisna exakly oot," replied the P. M., as he took his seat. "An as fur da sun shining, I don know. I'm seen him makin a better job o it. Bit it doesna muckle maitter, as lang as Meggie is livin."

"Living? I should think that Maggie is living. She's very much alive, I can tell you, and so are we all," said the Tittie. "You seem to be the only unconcerned person in the company."

"It's not at I'm unconcerned at aall; bit I juist hae a coarn o wit."

"So you say. Well, then, since you have so much of Solomon about you, or in you, we will give you the opportunity to pass judgment on our dresses and rig-out, as you call it, after breakfast.

The cabs have to be here at eleven o'clock. Mr Sylvester has hunted out and got cabs—real old-fashioned cabs, with richly-caparisoned, prancing horses pawing the ground,—horses with life and mettle in them, that can run like the wind. He doesn't like these taxies and motors, especially for a thing like this."

"I say wi him. To tell you da truth, alto I do alloo at dey can traivel ower da grund, I hate dis motors. Dey pit me in mind a some evil thing draggin you ta destruction. A body canna smok ita dem, ye canna spaek ita dem, you're alwis cowl'd ita dem, you can harly see da scenery fae dem, dey geng sae fast, an if a body wis sae minded, ye canna coort ita dem. No, no, gie me a horse; gie me a horse an a dug. I laek life. Man, dir somethin fine aboot a horse rinnin, even if it sood be in a owld gig going bumpin up an doon ower a stony rod, an a dug rinnin ahint an afore, barkin an carryin on as only dugs can. I'm very plaesed at Mr Sylvester haes settled ipu da horses. We'll no be able ta traivel sae fast as we'd du in Shetlan wi a clear rod afore wiz, bit da horses 'ill get troo some wye amung da gudeless croods its in dis place, fur dir juist laek da saands o da sea."

"After you have inspected our makes-up, another important matter has to be attended to, and that is, to see how YOU look, and whether you come up to OUR standard. You have to give Maggie away, you know."

"Dats shune don."

"Yes, but you must remember this is not a wedding in a country house. The wedding is

taking place in the most fashionable Church in London, and becoming and proper dignity is looked for. You have to come up the long aisle with Maggie, a dream of beauty, leaning on your arm, the eyes of many of the best people in London gazing at you all the time. Will you get through it?"

"Weel, fur mi appearance, da strood at you made me buy sood help. It wis dear anot, as I ken. Dan mi whisker wis attended til yesterday, an I hae ta go da day an get me hair don. Da glives is what I dunna laek. Dir ower peerie, an yet you say you will not allow dem ony bigger. Fur da folk lookin at me, dat'll not trouble me, my jewel. A man at's lukid i da face o a bear at wiz makkin ta hug him ta death, an nor-wast and sooth-wast hurricanes in a open boat bi da score, an faced Ould Horny in a dizzen idder wyies, is no gaen ta be pitten oot wi twartree folk lookin at him. Don't you tink it. We'll be aa richt, my jewel."

The inspection was duly carried out. The P. M. set "da weemen," as he called them, in a row, and viewed their dresses, hats, and general make up from all points, passing remarks on this and that without fear and without favour.

"On da whole, you're don no sae bad, considerin I wisna wi you ta help you. Fur mi nown pairt, I tink at Miss G.'s frock is juist a tint ower ticht, an your een could a been a coarn slacker. Mary's is no bad; kind o short, maybe, bit shu'll du. Betty's tippet is not richt; I see dat. Somethin wrang wi da left side o her; no hingin weel. Dats better. Da pearl brooch is no very weel

seen. Ower mony bits a ribbons yunder. Mary, staand streecht. Staand streecht up. Du's weel anof ta be seen. Du hed a faider an a midder at never bent dir broo ta onybody. Joannie, tak dee haands oot o dee pockets, boy, an dunna lat yon silver watch-gaard be seen ower muckle. Oh, you'll do; I'm not ashamed o you "

" The dresses having thus been damned with faint praise, what is your lordship's opinion of the hats?"

" Oh, da hats? Weel, dir juist weemen's hats, an dats aall at need be said. Hoo ony human bein can pit a gairden o flooers ipu da top o dir heads is a thing I could never mak oot. I alwis toucht at da ert wis da place fur flooers, or da trees. Bit dey look boanie, I most say; maybe kind o top-heavy, as we wid say; harly do in a gale o wind, you know, bit still boanie fur aa dat. Bit whaar's Meggie? What ir ye made o Meggie?"

" Like good wine, we have kept Maggie till the last. Here, Maggie, come out and let this connoisseur pass his opinion on your make-up," and opening a door the Tittie led Maggie forth for inspection.

" Aa-a-h, mi boys! Here we ir. Here shu comes. Here's Solomon in all his glory. Noo, Meggie, I'm seen dee in aall attitudes, an, as da Scriptir says, dir not wan o' dem arrayed laek dee. Noo, I wid juist aks dee wan whestin, an, as I know, wi da sense at du haes, du'll answir her truly. Did it ever come inta dy mind, whin du wis feedin hens an doin aa da wark o da croft, an efter dat, da wark o da hotel, at du wid ever come

ta dis? Mairy a man at writes books, a man o means too, in a graand kirk in London, rigged oot fur da bridal laek a wheen?"

"I never toucht onything about it."

"Maybe no. If du never toucht o gettin mairied, du's about da first o Eve's douchters ats been taen dat wye—"

"We're not wanting a lecture on marriage. We want your opinion on her wedding dress."

"Do you know at her dress sae bruckled me up at it nearly took da wind fae me. Her get-up is splendid. Nothin could be better. Shu pits every wan o you i da shade aatagedder. I wid gie a gude lok, do you know, ta hae Lowra Maikomson an Clemie Twatt, an twartree mair o dem, here, juist ta view Meggie. I wid. It wid be wirt a braw somethin. An it wid be wirt mair ta hear what dey said whin dey wir demsells. Meggie, does du know at du's lookin prime; tip-top. Da Wheen o Sheeba, whin shu cam ta try an get a howld o Solomon, couldna a been denkid oot better. Bit du's better as da Wheen o Sheeba. Shu couldna manage it; bit du haes. Mr E. is juist laek potty noo i dee haands. Tak du good care o him."

"Here's the cabs, I see," said Miss G., who had been undergoing all this inspection and listening to the P. M.'s talk with evident impatience. "For goodness' sake let us be going."

"Heth, do you know I tink dis horses 'ill du nothin bit prance," said the P. M. a quarter of an hour afterwards, during which time they had made practically no progress through the crowded streets

"Dey hae plenty o time fur prancin an pawin an shakin dir boanie heads."

"The streets are very congested this morning," said the Chairman.

"Nae doot da folk is come oot ta see wiz. A bridal aye taks oot folk ye ken, no maiter whaar ye go."

"Except in London. I don't suppose the Londoners have got particularly excited over the wedding of one of H.M. Peat Commission. Other things are happening besides that. But we are getting through. We are not far off now."

"I don know. You move twartree yairds, an a policeman howlds up his hand, dan you stop; dan he lats you go on; dan anidder een howlds up his haands; an so dey go on. It's as bad as rowin fae da haaf against a gale o wind."

Hanover Square Church was at length reached. Although situated in a quieter part of the city, still the number of people about was considerable; and as weddings were pretty well always going on there, interested spectators were generally in evidence, and on this occasion they were present in considerable numbers. Mr Sylvester was well known in London; and besides, the romance attaching to his wedding, the story of which had got in the papers, attracted a crowd to witness the marriage. Inside, the church was completely filled. As the wedding party alighted and saw the crowd outside, and caught a glimpse of the packed pews inside, even the P. M. felt that he must brace himself up to a great effort to carry out his part in a worthy manner; while the uppermost feeling in

Betty's mind was that she wished she was safe home at her fireside at Eshaness. Knowing, however, that this was impossible, she set herself to go through the ceremony in the best way possible.

Outside, the sound of the rich-toned organ could be heard; and as the party entered the church, Maggie leaning on the P. M.'s arm, the voices of a heavenly choir of boys fell in their ears. The music, so beautifully and sweetly sung, gripped Betty's heart; tears filled her eyes; she felt almost overcome, and only recovered her self-possession when they came to a standstill and the wedding ceremony began. The P. M. acted his part with a native dignity all his own. He was neither brazen nor meek, but carried himself in a way that impressed all who saw him. The hairdresser had done his work well, and had not exaggerated either one way or another; and Jerry's handsome though homely face, made all the more pleasant by the consciousness that he was taking a prominent part in the wedding of one for whom he had a great liking and a deep respect, shone with good humour and inward satisfaction, mingled with reverence for the solemn and beautiful service. Maggie did all that was required and all that was expected. Although she felt the solemnity of the occasion in a much greater degree than had ever been impressed upon her at weddings at home—a solemnity which the surroundings, the service, the music, the people, made all the deeper,—yet she kept her head, and went through the ceremony with dignity and grace. The most nervous of the whole was Mr E.—Mr Sylvester. Having had to wait with

his groomsmen, some time before the hour fixed, he got a little excited, and impatient, and at times would have given worlds to be at home with his books. However, after the bride and her maids, together with the others, arrived, he recovered himself, and no hitch whatever occurred in the carrying out of the complete ceremony. Perhaps the most interested of all in the church was the Tittie. This was the climax to all the planning and arranging and purchasing which she had been engaged in during the last three weeks. Maggie, her dear Maggie, was really being married, and that in a style which any girl would envy. In her heart, she made a vow that her wedding would be similar, and if possible, in the same place, and no one but her beloved Jerry should give her away.

The usual formalities having been satisfactorily performed, the bridal party came down the aisle to the strains of the Wedding March, which rang through the groined rafters with joyous peals. On arrival outside they were met with the usual hurricane of confetti, some of which stuck tenaciously into the P. M.'s beard, and after some spontaneous and hearty cheering from the crowd they entered the cabs and were after some delays on the streets deposited at the Savoy Hotel, where the wedding breakfast was waiting for them. A sumptuous though elegant repast it was, and one that Joanie remembered all the days of his life. The usual speeches were made, toasts proposed, drunk, and responded to; and when this was over, a gentleman rose and said he had a request to make before they dispersed. That was, Would the gentleman

who had given away the bride to-day favour the company with a few words? (Thunderous applause). He understood that this gentleman was no ordinary individual. He was, in fact, he believed, the P. M., the Practical Member of the Peat Commission, regarding whose doings, and in particular the sayings of the P. M. in that body, everyone was talking. Even Londoners were now reading with the greatest interest and with the heartiest appreciation, the narrative of that famous body, all the members of which were here to-day. Now, it would simply be unpardonable to allow such an opportunity as this to slip. He earnestly hoped that Mr Laurenson would favour the company with a few remarks. He was sure his views on any subject was well worth hearing. (Loud applause).

Jerry, who was somewhat taken aback, reflected a moment. He felt that he was hardly just in first-class form. "Dis wine, you know," he muttered to himself, "doesna hae da boady or da pooer o a drap o gude liquor; bit still, I'll hae ta try."

The P. M.'s getting to his feet was the signal for another outburst of applause.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "Its not aften I mak speeches. I laeve dat ta da ministers an da Parliamenter, fur dat's dir bisniss. Bit since ye tink I sood say somethin at dis time, I'll try ta du as weel as I can. Of coorse we're met here aboot da weddin, an nothin else, an I'll juist confine mi remarks, as da ministers wid say, ta dat line. Noo, dir juist wan thing I want ta say. I

alwis hed da idee at dis leetry men, dis men at sits an pores into books, you know, and writes, an tries ta finn oot aboot wirds, an whaar dey cam fae, an whaar dey guid til, wis aye kind a peculiar bodies. (Loud laughter). An I most say, whin I first becam acquaint wi Mr Sylvester, I toucht dat still more. (Shrieks of laughter). Bit do you know, I'm altered mi opeenion; fur I'm beginnin ta finn oot at som o dem, wan here and dere, does hae a coarn o wit. (Loud laughter). An da more I got ta ken Mr Sylvester da more I toucht o him. Bit bi bit he cam doon ta da ert, an he began ta finn cot at da ert contained loks o things at afore he never kent onything aboot. An wan o da things he fann wis her at's his bride dis day. (Hear, hear). Noo, da man at hed da sense ta faa in love wi her at's noon Mrs Sylvester canna be wan o dis oardnir leetry bodies, fur he hed da sense ta see sense, an ta pick sense, an I assure you, dats not uswil wi men. Fur very often you see men at haes sense gettin fixed ta some een at haes non. (Loud laughter). Noo, as I'm said mony a time, Mrs Sylvester has nateril sense, midder wit, an I truly believe shu'll mak a good, obedient wife, an follow da Scriptir i da wye at Paal tells dem aa ta do. Your wye o doin a weddin is not da sam as wirs at hom. We hae far mair fun at wir weddins, an I don know, if Betty an me wis mairyin ower agen, at I wid tak your wye. You're nearly aa Kirk; we wiz we begin i da kirk, bit we end at hom, wi da fiddles and dancin. Bit every wan ta dir owen wyes. Fur meself, I wid chok if I hed ta stay here, fur dir no a breath o fresh air i da place; an

very laekly if aa da folk in London cam ta Esha-ness, dey wid finn it kind o wheer. Aa da sam, I most say I'm enjoyed dis trip rael weel. Da folk is aafil nice, alto dir a lok o dem, an wan can see things in London ye can see in nae idder place. Afore sittin doon, noo, I wid juist aks you ta drink wan idder tost ta da bride an bridegroom. 'Lang may dir lum reek.' "

The toast was pledged with enthusiasm.

The happy company soon afterwards dispersed, everyone declaring it was worth while coming to the wedding breakfast to hear the P. M.'s speech, which was worth half-a-dozen of the conventional order. The bridal pair went to spend their honeymoon at a destination unknown, and the other members of the Commission went to the hotel to talk over the events of the great day.

CHAPTER LXVI.

The P. M. in a "fechtin mood."

"Dir juist wan thing I wid laek ta see richt, hae a good look at, you know, in dis place, an dats da Tooer o London," remarked the P. M. at breakfast next morning. "Redder, dir two things, I wid laek ta see a real prize-feeht, or a wreslin match. I tink dir nothin finer as ta see twa men juist in dir prime haein a wrastle or a feeht. Dan dey tell me you can see da very block at dey took aff da folks' heads ipun, yiss, an da very axe too, i da Tooer."

"Oh, Jirry, Jirry, fur dee. Fur you men. Alwis wantin ta be feehtin, as if dey wirna plenty o it already," said Betty, with a sigh. "Nothin plaeses you better as ta see a feeht, or ta be in een."

"Weel, du sees, we feeht wan wye, an you feeht anidder. If it wisna fur feehtin, some wye or anidder, da world wid die up. Da very animals fechts, an aets een anidder."

"Yiss, bit dats not ta say at sensible men sood du da sam."

"Weel, I wid not go sae far as ta say at I wid aet dem, fur som o dem most be kind o teouch, as weel as unsavoury. Bit sometimes I feel at I wid

laek ta geng oot an juist hae a good feecht. I'm not parteeklar wha its wi eddern."

"Dear me," said the Tittie, "what's put you in this bellicose, bloodthirsty frame of mind this morning?"

"I canna tell you, my daatie, but sometimes it taks me dat wye. Its maybe da Nort blod, you know; I don know. Bit mony a time I juist feel at I wid laek ta go oot an hae a glorious row. Knock doon somebody an hae a staand-up feecht. Do you know, whin you come ta consider it, dats da wye at dis objects o folk i da sooth haes hed ony kind o wit or sense pitten ita dem."

"Oh-hi?"

"Yiss, bit its true, though. Da nort folk, you know, da Norsemen, da Scandanavians, an Danes, an aa dat lot, couldna rest i dir homs i da owld time. Dey hed ta geng oot an fecht,—fecht, an tak, an reeve, an plunder. An dan dey wid seettle doon fur a while. An of coorse dey cam ta Scotland an England, an aa ower. An dont you see, what wis best in dem—an aa dir bravery, an strent, an darin, an manly wyes, got mixed, you see, wi da folk at dey cam amung."

"And what about the worst that was in them?"

"Ah, bit dey wir nae warst, my jewel. So you see da rovin, dare-deevil speerit is in some o dem yit. An dat's why I want ta see some fechtin dis day."

"Well, to the Tower of London we may go with you; but as for going to see two men smashing at each other, or wrestling, that I know neither Betty, nor Mary, nor Miss F., nor I will do. I

think you would be better advised to get the papers and your pipe and have a quiet day to yourself."

"Dat I will not. I most do somethin, or see somethin."

"Were you speaking about seeing the Tower of London," asked Mr C.

"Yiss, we wir. I wis sayin I wid laek ta see yon block o wid dey took da folks' heads aff ipun, an da dungeons an aa dat kind o thing."

"Jirry, Loard forgie dee."

"If you want to see the Tower of London, I will be delighted to show you over the place, for I have been there a dozen times. A most interesting place it is."

"Dat's what I wid tink."

"All the crown jewels are there, to be seen, are they not?" asked Miss F.

"Oh, yes; a magnificent sight, I assure you. and scores, hundreds of coats of armour, and all the panoply with which the knights we read about girded themselves for 'the pomp and circumstance of glorious war' are there to be seen."

"Faider," whispered Joanie, who had been reading "Ivanhoe," "ask him if da suit o da Black Prince an Gilbert an dem is dere tu."

"Joanie wid laek ta ken if da suit of a Black Prince an some idder o da ould chaps is dere ta be seen."

"I think so. You will see there the coats of armour of the men, who have made English history. A grand sight. Was it not Shelley who said—

'The Knights are dust,
Their good swords rust;
Their souls are with the saints, we trust.'

It's fine to see these old things."

"Well, if we can see all that, the jewels and the coats of armour, we'll come with you," said the Tittie, "if it should only be for the purpose of keeping this old war-horse out of mischief."

"Mind, Jirry, if I come, I'm no gaen to look ipun da blocks an axes. So don't tak me ta dem," said Betty.

"Weel, weel, you weemen can geng an stare at da jewels as lang as ye laek, an yon cots o armour at wance held men. Dats twa things you never get tired o. We'll go an see da idder things as weel."

It was not long until the party were at the Tower, Betty having a feeling that she would rather not see this place, associated in her mind as it was with much from which her gentle, womanly nature recoiled. But since the others wished to go, she felt it would not be nice to stay behind.

"Here we are," said Mr C. "You see that low arch, there?"

"Yae."

"Underneath that arch prisoners who had been brought to the Tower were taken to the dungeons to await their fate."

"Which, I suppose, generly meent at da head went aff. An not only men, I'm towld, bit weemen too."

"Oh, Jirry, Jirry, dunna spaek aboot it. Da poor woomen."

"Feth, I don know. I tink dir a lok ta be said fur da owld wye. Da thing wis don, an dey wir nae mair about it. Short an sharp."

"Less-a-less!" sighed Betty.

"An whaar's da block an da axe?" enquired Jerry.

"I think we'll better go and see the jewels and the armoury first," said Mr C. "The ladies are not so blood-thirsty as you are."

"No, some o dem is not da richt breed. Feth, i da owld days, a lok o da weemen could gie da men a braa haand i da fechtin at went on. Dir gettin safter noo."

What impressed Jerry more than the crown jewels, which, he said, must have cost "a pooer o money," was the dress of the men who guarded it, and who were dotted every here and there in the precincts of the Tower, namely, the beef-eaters. "Man, yon's da funniest rig-oot I ever saw i mi life. More laek guizers as onything else. An sae weel plaesed as dey ir wi' demsells, too." But he did not waste time over the jewels. He dragged off Mr C. to show him, along with a guide, what he wanted to see—the execution block, the dungeons, the Bloody Tower, and all the instruments of "deevilry," as he called them, that were in use not so many hundred years ago. Coming back to the armoury, which the rest of the party was admiring, the P. M. had a good look round also.

"Man, it most a been very awkward ta fecht cled i da laek o yon. You couldna hae muckle freedom in yon things. An da men at yon held couldna been big. Not laek da Nort men. No,

no. Dey wir da boys fur you. Dey could come an slauchter you; dey hed some strent an size, an dey laekid nothing better as a fecht."

"You're in a most terrible mood to-day. Nothing but fighting and slaughter in all your conversation," said the Tittie.

"Yiss, do you know, I feel at I wid laek ta be goin a plunderin voyage dis very day. I wid juist laek to be amung a baand setting oot i dir war galley fur a winter raid. I can pictir ta messell da men gettin aa dir war implemints ready, an da galley lyin at a kind o a pier gettin filled up wi dir bits o needs; an dan whin da richt wind cam, aff shu goes. Up goes da grotta; oot da voe shu goes, boys; wi da cheers o da weemen i dir ears. Dan da smell an da heave o da sea, an da voyage ta places dey wir never at afore."

"Yes, and what about the storms, and what of those who never came back?"

"Oh, weel, dey juist hed ta tak dir chance, my jewel. Men most wirk, an weemen most weep. Dat's been da wye o da world aa da time; an it 'ill be da sam ta da end. Bit dey wir something fine aboot da owld rovers, pirates as dey wir."

"They wouldn't have liked if others had come and taken all they had."

"Feth, dey hed ta pit up wi some o dat too. Bit dey met dem. Dey didna rin away. Ah-ah; dey wir mony a boanie fecht i da owld days. Man ta man. Battle-axe ta battle-axe. Non o your mawin doon bi da thoosand wi guns. No, no. Giv me her man fur man."

"Look here, I think the best we can do is to

get you away. This place has set your old Norse blood boiling. You'll be knocking down one of these beef-eaters just for the fun of the thing."

"Feth, it widna tak muckle ta knock some o dem doon."

"Come away. W have seen all we want to see, and I must say, have enjoyed it to the full. I think we'll go now to Madame Tassaud's."

"Isna dat whaar dir a Chaimber o Horrors?"

"Jirry, du most not spaek aboot ony more horrors dis day," said Betty, appealingly. "I'm heard o nothin bit axes an blocks an dungeons an fechtin fae ever I raise."

"I'm not wantin dee ta come an see da place. You weemen can go an view aa da kings and wheens an fine leddies an graand dresses. If I want ta go inta dis Chaimber, I don't see what's ta pervent me. Dir wan thing you'll get dere at you'll laek, at ony rate, an dat's a cup o tae."

"That will be one mercy," said the Tittie, "for sight-seeing is very tiring, do you know."

A visit to this interesting place afforded more pleasure to Betty and the young ladies than the time spent in the Tower, for they had a rest and a refreshing cup of tea, heard some good music, and viewed the dummy figures—very life-like—of innumerable interesting personalities, dressed as when in the flesh. Jerry of course sought out the Chamber of Horrors, "bit, do you know," he said, "I wis disäppointed. I saw nae horror. Of coorse I saw loks o folk at's made horror, dat's true anof; an loks o things at maks you shudder

whin you tink what's been don wi dem. Bit I most say I expeckit ta see somethin' waar."

"The ladies now suggest that we should go to a restaurant and have a nice lunch, and then spend the afternoon at a matinee in the Coliseum," said Mr C. to the P. M.

"I'm alwis hed da wit, all mi life, ta dü everything I wis bidden bi da weemen—if it wis raesona-ble, of coorse, an if dey want me to go ta jile, I'm white ready ta go, pervided dey mak me comfortable. It's aall da sam ta Jeremiah. You dunna see onything aboot a prize-fecht comin aff da nicht, du you?"

"Not to-night. But I see a first-class match coming off to-morrow night at the National Sporting Club."

"We'll go dan; we twa. Say you nothin aboot it, though. Don't mention it ta Betty, or ony o dem. We'll gie dem da slip da moarn's nicht, an go an see da match."

Lunch, a matinee at the Coliseum, which they all thoroughly enjoyed, and dinner in the evening at the hotel, were rounded off by a visit to the Palace Picture of Varieties at night.

"Da whantity o folk wis wirt seein, alon. An da wye yon folk does things, its most splendid. An yon orchester away i da distance, you know, at times, an very near at haand idder times, was raelly—well, I don know what ta caall it. Raelly and truly it wis weel wirt da money. Da folk in London can du things, I see dat. I daarsay some o dem widna ken weel what ta du in a open boat in a gale o wind; bit still, every man till his trade,

as da ould wife said ta da sodjer when he said he wid shoot her."

A few more days were spent in London. Sight-seeing, going to various places of amusement—which included, on Jerry's part, a visit to the National Sporting Club to witness the prize-fight he had so much longed to see, and which he completely enjoyed—making some purchases, and generally seeing life in the multifarious aspects that only London can present, filled up the time, which passed quickly and pleasantly. Betty, however, was becoming restless. The surroundings did not suit her. She was not at home, and felt that until she was installed in her own cottage at Eshaness, she could never feel comfortable. Seeing, however, that Mary and Joanie were enjoying themselves as only young people can, she held her peace and made no sign, but took part in everything that went on with an apparent interest and avidity. But a letter from a near neighbour, who wrote telling her about the animals on the croft and how they were getting on, determined her that she could stay no longer.

"Jirry," she said one morning after breakfast, as they were sitting alone, "I'm goin hom. Du'll hae ta tak me hom. I'm wearyin fur mi ain fireside."

"Weel, I widna say. Bit what's pitten dat i dee head dis time o day?"

"I dunna ken, I'm shure. Bit I hae a letter here fae Mary Twatt, an shu says da calf is no weel, an dir twa o da hens dead, an da sholmit coo is no takin her maet. We're haed anof o dis place."

I want ta go hom an be in paece an rest, an look oot ipu da sea, an da skerries, an da voe, an da bit o laand at I'm wirkid in aa mi life, an look efter da eemiges o animals at we hae."

"I daarsay. I winder hoo Spark is?"

"I dunna ken. Shu says nothin aboot Spark, bit laekly he's no very weel eddern."

"Bit whats ta be dune wi Mary an da boy?"

"Fur Mary I dont know; bit fur da boy, dir only wan answir ta dat whestin, as du kens. Da boy comes wi wiz. Aboot Mary, I dunna ken. Shu's spaekin o stayin a while yet, fur Meggie—I mean Mrs Sylvester—aksed her ta come and stey wi her in Kent whaar her hom is, efter da honeymoon, fur a mont or twa. Mary micht be left. Shu's no a infant, alto in dis place, raelly I harly think its safe ta laeve onything."

"Shu'll be safe anof alang wi da idder folk. I see nothin ta pervent her. Mary is gotten ideas, I can tell dee, abune wirkin on a croft. Mary is tinkin ta go ta wan o da schules here. Shu's on, I see dat, shu's on fur some o dis new wark at weemen is takin up—typewritin, or shorthaand, or somethin o dat kind. Maybe music."

"Weel, weel, I dunna ken. As lang as shu's weel, its aa da sam. Bit hom I'm goin. Whan can du mak a start?"

"Fur dat I don know. I'll need ta go an aks aboot dis trains, an da steamer."

"Never mind da steamer. Lat wiz win as far as Aberdeen, dan we're kind o wye hom. We'll aye manage da rest."

Enquiry elicited the fact that a train was leav-

ing that night at 10.30 for Aberdeen. On receipt of this information Betty made up her mind that she and her belongings would be in it, for she would delay no longer. The news of the departure of Betty, Jerry and Joanie was conveyed to the party at lunch, and caused much regret and some surprise, for the others felt that without this trio they were robbed to a large extent of what made the visit to London so interesting. But Betty had made up her mind; and although Joanie had cried silently and in loneliness for an hour, and the P. M. himself was somewhat disappointed, both knew that there was nothing for it but to submit. Preparations were accordingly made, everyone helping as far as they were able, and with many words of regret, many handshakes, and wishes for a safe and pleasant passage, the three were seen off from the station.

Every throb of the engine, Betty felt with intense satisfaction, brought her nearer home, home, home. Every station they passed, every town and city whose lights they left behind, was a step farther on the road. She felt she could endure any discomfort, any inconvenience, if only she could get home. As she lay back in the carriage, in her mind's eye she saw herself coming to her beloved cottage. She saw the calf running to meet her, the kye looking at her with their dull eyes, the cat purring at her side, the hens "kaecklin," and Spark jumping up over her barking with joy. She saw her kind neighbours coming to meet her and Jerry and Joanie; she saw the Muckle Osa and Hamnavoe; she felt the stillness and peacefulness, and

quiet beauty of it all ; she heard the low, deep sound of the sea. She thanked Heaven she was going home. Morning found the train at Aberdeen, and Jerry after finding a comfortable hotel, set out to ascertain how matters lay with regard to the steamer. He was fortunate, for the St. Clair was leaving that afternoon for Stromness and the West Side, which joyful news made Betty look five years younger. Within forty-eight hours of the time of leaving, the P. M., Betty, and Joanie were ashore at Hillswick, and, with the aid of a motor, in a few minutes they stood at their own door at Eshaness, the tears in Betty's eyes, and Jerry strangely silent.

CHAPTER LXVII.

The P. M. and Betty discuss the Draft Report.

So devoutly thankful was Betty that she had reached home and fireside, that she sat in her arm-chair for a considerable time without saying a word, gazing into the dead fire, the cat and Spark caressing her all the time.

"Heth, I tink what we need is somethin ta aet," said her other half. "It's aa very weel ta com hom; bit ta come hom an sit an stoor inta twartree black paets, an no even ta mak a shape o gettin a cup o tae, is not very warmly."

"I'se shune get a cup o tae," sighed Betty. "You men tink aboot nothin bit your insides. No, no. Ye never ken what a woman tinks, an haes ta tink, fae da craidle ta da grave. Joanie, jewel, will du geng inta Betty Edwardson an aks her fur twartree lowin braands. Dee faider 'ill maybe look fur twartree cups and saucers."

As Betty got up with a sigh and went ben to take off her things, Jerry muttered a good deal to himself. "Dis weemen wis weel caad precaarious inseks, fur precaarious dey wir made, an precaarious dey ir. Dere's shu, noo, at wis in a amp an a aet ta get hom, restless, restless, you know, away fae da owld place. An yit, nae shuner does shu plant hersell in her very nown restin shair, as shu

sits an seechs, an harly even tink's o a cup o tae. An whin a woman comes ta dat—weel, I'll say nothin. Shu's a bruckle o a world. Shu is. Of coorse its hard ta say what Betty wis tinkin aboot. Maybe da sicht o da owld fireside, you know, pat her in mind o da peerie, boanie ting o lass at we lost i da maesles lang ago. Or maybe shu wis tinkin aboot da idder eens ats away, an whin dey wir aa peerie bairns, an noo dir men an weemen; or maybe aboot Mary. It's hard ta say. You can never tell. Bit dir wan thing. Shu's not tinkin edder aboot da iron hoose or da ston hoose. I believe shu's forgotten even aboot da chiffonier an da sattee thing. I don't believe shu'll ever enter edder wan or da idder. No, I don't believe it. Weel, I'm sure I'm no carin. Dis place wis good anof fur me aa mi life, an it can du ta da end. Bairns, ir dey only twa saacers? Hère's tree cups, bit I only can mak oot twa saacers. Dir plenty o plates. Twa spunes. Weel, nobody can say at we hae cwer muckle o dis world's goods, as far as dis hoose is concerned, at ony rate. Oh, dis is dee, Joanie? Boy, yon'll no licht a fire. Da braands is nearly blown away. What's keepid dee?"

"I met Joanie Edwardson an Ertty Biglan."

"An du stude an spak ta dem an da lowin braands blowin away aa da time. Oh, fur dy witlessness an want o sense."

"Da braands 'ill du weel anof," said Betty, entering the room. Betty could not bear to hear the slightest word of reproach applied to Joanie.

“ I’ll shune hae da fire up. Haes du funn ony cups an saacers?”

“ I fann tree cups, bit only twa saacers an twa spunes.”

“ I wid juist expec dat. Set a man ta du a thing, an its don. Yiss; it is dat. Dir plenty o cups an saacers.”

“ Weel, whaar does du hae dem?”

“ I ken whaar I hae dem.”

“ An hoo can I ken whaar du haes dem?”

“ Joanie, geng an fetch a drap o water. I’ll shune get aa at we need, sae muckle as da peety.”

At this juncture the P. M. considered it wisest to cease from his labours, and sit down and wait patiently till tea was ready. The homely meal was partaken of, almost in silence. Betty recovered somewhat under the influence of the bright fire and the tea, allowed the cat to sit on her knee, did not “cush” away the hens that came in to welcome her, and gradually became her old self. Jerry said little; and as soon as the meal was over, lit his pipe and took up his paper. Joanie quietly went out to see his chums; and Betty, left thus alone, suddenly remembered that she had the calf that “wisna weel,” to attend to; and Sholma, that “wisna takin hier maet,” and many things besides. Clearing the tea table, she set about duties which speedily interested her, and in which she was soon engrossed.

Life went on in the quiet way of the country for a month. Betty was quietly happy. Her mind was concentrated on those around her, Joanie and Jerry; and on the animals—the cows, calves,

hens, lambs, and other living things. She had plenty to do, and time passed pleasantly and quickly. Joanie was the hero of the neighbourhood, and filled the position with becoming dignity. Jerry took things quietly and philosophically. He just did enough to "keep himself oot o' langer," as he said; read the papers and letters he got; went now and then to Hillswick, and filled up time in a quiet and even way.

"Yon wis a heavy letter du got dis moarnin, Jerry," said his better half one post day.

"Yae, shu wis heavy anof, an bulky anof, an big anof."

"An what wis shu aboot?"

"What wis shu aboot? Yon wis what da Chairman caas da draft report o da Paet Commission. We hae ta gie a report ta Parliament, du knows."

"So I understand. An what does it say?"

"Say! Faith, I'm been reading fur tree oors, an I can raelly hardly tell dee what shu says. Dir plenty o wirds; bit, I don know; dir not a great dael aboot paets."

"Weel, dir shurly somethin. Canna du read twartree lines?"

"I can du dat. Da letters is big anof. It's what dey caa dis typewritin, and da Chairman says it been drawn up bi da leetry man, Mr E., dat's Mr Sylvester."

"I ken. Dat's what he wis fur—ta draw up da report."

"Lat me see noo. We'll begin at da beginnin. 'Acting on a command from His Gracious

Majesty the King, conveyed through his well-beloved Commons in Parliament assembled, a body of ladies and gentlemen, of whom I had the honour to be one, who had been selected after most careful enquiry as to their fitness and for their wide and accurate knowledge and for their well-known ability to acquire and assimilate information on the question for the elucidation of which they had been appointed, proceeded in June 1917 to the remote isles of Shetland—by some writers considered to be the Ultima Thule of the ancients, but this, I may parenthetically remark, is disputed by others—lying between 59 degrees, 30 minutes, 30 seconds, and 60 degrees, 51 minutes, 40 seconds north latitude, and nought degrees, 43 minutes, 30 seconds, and 2 degrees, 6 minutes, 30 seconds west longitude, and comprising over one hundred islands, large and small—to enquire into and report upon the peat industry in these parts. It may fittingly be here remarked that the question of utilising the deposits of peat in the nation had been brought before the notice of Parliament, the members of which body, as every one knows, or should know, spend sleepless nights in pondering over and anxiously considering how best the interests of the country may be promoted, and whose methods of foresight and economy, coupled with marvellous efficiency and ability in every Department, are the wonder and admiration of the whole world. The outcome of this matter receiving the Government's consideration, was the appointment of a Peat Commission—a body whose efficiency reflected that of the Government which appointed it—”

“Loard guide me, da man is no goin on laek yon, is he?”

“Yon! Yon’s only da beginning, my jewel. I’m tellin dee I’m lookid troo da most o her, an I see harly onything aboot paets ava. Of coorse, du’s got ta consider at da man is bit newly mairied, and he’s no gotten aa his wits back yet. Faith, I’m no gotten aa mine yet, eddern, an I’m been mairied a gude while.”

“Du never haed muckle at ony time, so du didna hae muckle ta loss.”

“Maybe. So. Weel, lat me see whaar we wir. Oh, here. ‘The body thus appointed—and I may state that the appointment, and particularly the selection of members, met with the unanimous approval of the whole nation, to judge from the press, than which no truer mirror of public opinion can be held up—’”

“Mirror? Mirror? What’s he awey efter lookin glesses fur?” asked Betty.

“Betty, I tink du’s tint da coarn o wit da Loard gae dee. It wisna muckle ta begin wi; bit du nicht try an mak use o it. Da man is not efter lookin glesses. He means at papers, newspapers, kind o wye gies wiz a idee o what da folk is tinkin, an it refleks, doesna du see, dir mind da sam wye as a mirror refleks dy face.”

“Weel, what’s dat got ta du wi paets? Whan is he comin ta da paets? What’s da need o aa dis mirrors?”

“My Betty at du is, da man is not left Aberdeen yet, far less come ta da paets. An as fur da mirror bisniss, dat’s juist what dey caa da poetical

wye o sayin things. He haed ta write aboot da romance o paets, doesna du see, as weel as da paets demsells."

"Heth, he's no seen muckle a dem, or he wid say less aboot da romance, as du caas it. Weel, what neist?"

"Yiss, what neist? He wfs sayin at everybody approved, as he said, o da members o da Paet Commission—"

"Heth, I ken o wan at didna, an dat wis Lowra Maikomson."

"Poor sowl, Lowra. Dat wis juist becaas Erty wisna on. Weel, he goes on,—'Arrived at Aberdeen, after preliminary arrangements had been made, the Commission found they had a few hours at their disposal before the vessel which plied to the hyperborean regions for which they were bound was ready to sail. They therefore used these hours in seeing as much as possible of that fine city. For it has to be noted—and the fact reflects the utmost credit on the perspicacity—'

"Loard love me, Jirry, what is yon?"

" 'The perspicacity and foresightedness of our beneficent Government—that it was one of the terms of our remit that we should lose no opportunity of acquiring useful information on any and every subject. We therefore visited the principal places of interest in and around the city, including that very beautiful building, Marischal College; read up its history from a Guide Book, and generally filled up the time at our disposal to the best advantage. After dinner and a rest at the Balmoral Hotel, we motored down to the quay where the vessel that was to be

our home for twenty-two hours was lying. At the office of the Company—and here I would remark on the fact that everywhere we went, we were received with the utmost cordialty and respect by the whole populace without distinction of class—we were met by the genial manager of the Company, who had been apprised of our arrival, and who had spared himself no trouble to make our sea journey as comfortable as circumstances would permit. The officers and crew of the vessel, also, did us honour. They saluted us as we came on board, for of course they recognised that we, being engaged on work of national importance, were entitled to becoming honour and respect. After chatting with the manager of the Company for a few minutes—”

“ Jirry, whin is da man comin ta da paets?”

“ Woman, he’s not left Aberdeen, I’m tellin dee, yit. Dis weemen will interrup. He wis sayin, ‘ after chatting with the manager for a few minutes, the craft got under weigh, and after experiencing some difficulty in getting out, we reached the open sea. Never shall I forget the fascinating beauty of the scene—the wide waste of waters, the sun scintillating on the dancing, laughing waves, the cry of the sea birds, the long, low roll of the sea, the landscape fading away in the distance, the blue vault of heaven above, and far away on the horizon the pearly azure that made us gasp with its sheer beauty. (“ He’s shurly taen a tint whin he wrote dat bit. I’m seen her idder wyies, too ”). Some of the passengers, however, were not in a state to drink in and enjoy the beauty of the surroundings, for an hour or two after leaving port, they silently

disappeared, betook themselves to their cabins, and were seen no more until Lerwick—the capital of the Shetland Islands—was reached. I understand that they were overcome with mal-de-mer—”

“De-mer? What does he mean?” asked Betty.

“He juist means at dey wir seek, sea-seek.”

“Weel, why canna he say so, dan?”

“I don know. Dats da wye wi some o dis leetry bodies. Ye never ken what dey mean sometimes. Weel, he goes on—‘I have often thought it was a thousand pities that no cure has yet been discovered for this distressing malady. So much enjoyment is lost through its operation, on both men and women, that I have come to the conclusion that it would be in the public interest for the Government to appoint a Commission to enquire into and report on the matter—’”

“Ertly Maikomson nicht get ipun dat een. Ertly kens aboot da sea,” said Betty.

“Not a bad idee dat. Of coorse dir juist wan cure at I ken o’ an everybody kens o; bit dat need-na hinder dem appointin a Commission. Whaar ir we noo? Here we ir. ‘No greater national service—a service which would benefit every soul in our sea-girt isle—could be rendered than that which would discover a permanent cure for sea-sickness. It would do more to uplift humanity than many of the nostrums for the cure of our social ills we hear so much about. This, however, is just a thought by the way. To my tale—’”

“Jirry, I tink I’ll hae ta geng an mak a cup o tae. I can sit nae langer listening ta da laek o

yon ithoot sumthin. Whin will da man come ta da paets?"

"I'm tould dee, I don't know. He's no in Lerrick yet, an its a braa bit fae Lerrick ta Hills-wick. I'll tak a cup o tae tu, an hae a smok. We can tak her up again. We'll get troo some time."

"Weel, my Betty, I don know," said the P. M. after tea. "I'm been haein anidder look troo dis report. I'm not read her troo, every wurd; bit I'm been lookin here an dere ta see if dir ony mention o da wark o da Commission; fur as du kens as weel as I, we did a braa lok. Bit I'm no come across onything yet."

"Heth, Mr Sylvester laekly haes mair sense as you haed, fur he kent weel anof at you did very little bit kalivant aboot da place; an he's laekly tryin ta mak da most o it bi pittin doon a lok o wuids."

"Of coorse, du's bound ta say dat. We hed tree sittins, an did a day's castin, dat's twa things at nedder he or dee can get oot o; an fur da time we wir ower it, I'm shure we did as muckle as mony anidder Commission. Na, its not fur dat. It's juist da wye da man haes o sayin things. He never seems ta come ta da point."

"Weel, du'll better begin whaar du left aff. We'll shurely get a paet here an dere among it."

"I expec we'll hae ta trivel fur dem, dan. Lat me see. What's dis. Here's a lang rüde aboot Fair Isle, an a Duke Gomez, an da story o da Spanish Armada ship at wis wracked dere, an aa aboot da folk feedin da men till dey haed naethin ta feed demsells wi, an so on he goes. Dan he goes inta

da birds an da bird life, an Fair Isle bein a great place fur birds whin dir flittin. Six solid pages about Fair Isle.

“Weel, he shurly laeves Fair Isle some time.”

“Yae, here he is at Sumburgh Head. Dan he goes ta Fitfil, and begins ta tell aa aboot Norna—da witch, du knows, da witch—an tells wis what a fine bowld headland it is—an heth dan he goes back ta Sumburgh Head again, ta tell about da lichthoose, an a man at he caas Stevenson, an Sir Walter Scott, an Jarlshof,—a great screed o twal pages.”

“Wha is carin about aa dat? We ken at Sumburgh Head an Fitful Head is dere. Dir been dere mony a year, an dey’ll be a while yit. Can da man no move on?”

“Dat’s not da kind o him, my jewel. A man ats taen fifty year huntin fur a wife, an widna tak een till he wis sure he got da very wan da Loard made fur him, is not laekly ta be in a hurry aboot onything. He’s a parteeklar person, I can tell dee. Faith, its a peety at more men didna follow his example. Hed more men taen fifty years ta tink, an wale, an pick, afore dey mairried, dey wid a been fewer mairriages, an more owld maids, I know dat. Aa da sam, does du know at da mention o Sumburgh Head pits me in mind o a rale guid story.”

“An what’s dat,” asked Betty. “Cat, be in paece; pittin mi wirsid aa in a bruckle.”

“Weel, du knows, dy wye o it wis dis. Da Ness folk is aafil fur howldin meetins ta convert da sinner—”

“ Heth, I know dir plenty o need fur da sam thing here, fur dir some o dem wid need a earthquake ta move dem.”

“ Dat wis juist what I wis comin til. Dey wir mowldid meetins, an howldid meetins, here an dere an everywhere, an alto a lok o da tolk did see, laek Paal, da error o dir wyees, dir wis som at did not an wid not. Nothin could move dem; no, nothin. Laek Israel of owld, dey wir joined ta dir idols, an went dir nown wye.”

“ An whats aa dis gotten ta du wi Sumburgh Head?”

“ I’m juist comin ta dat, I’m tellin dee. Weel, wan o da men at wis howldin dis meetins, du knows, spaekin til anidder een aboot da young folk, an heth some o da owld folk too, at showed no signs o goin i da richt path, said to him, says he, ‘ I tell dee what it is, Joanie, du micht as weel try ta blaw Sumburgh Head away wi a moothfu o peas, as ta move dat baand in da richt direction.’ Dats whaar Sumburgh Head comes in, doesna du see? Dey most a been a hard lot, ta be as stony an stiff as Sumburgh Head.”

“ Dir not more stiff-neckid as mony o da folk here aboot. An as fur dem in Lerrick, da man micht a said Roeness Hill, instead o Sumburgh Head. Less-a-less! What is dis world comin til?”

“ I don know. I suppose shu’ll juist move on i da sam owld wye. Ta him at hath, du knows, shall be given, an him at hath not—. Heth, I’m funn, in my pilgrimage, at dem at says laest is da best ta get on wi. Dem ats alwis howldin aff aboot

da idder world taks a very good grip o dis een. Dat's what I'm funn oot."

"Du's funn oot mony a queer thing, bi dy wye o it. I tink du'll better read more an spaek less."

"Weel, weel, I'se du say. So; he's got past Sumburgh Head, an here he comes ta Moosa, an dir a lang screed aboot a woman an a man."

"Never mind Moosa an da woman an da man. Dir plenty o dem aboot ony time. Finn oot whin he comes ta Lerrick, an read what he says dere."

"Aa richt; aa richt. So, so. Weel, here's his very wirds, dan—

"We arrived at Lerwick, the capital of the Shetland Islands, at a time and hour when the town was seen to the very best advantage. Guarded on the east by the beautiful Isle of Bressay, famous for its ponies, its magnificent Isle of Noss, the home of hundreds of thousands of sea-birds, its cradle, its majestic Bard, and its beautiful Old stone, the town of Lerwick lies sheltered from the biting east wind and the breakers of the North Sea. A commodious and safe harbour, with entrance from north and south, the envy of every sea-port in the United Kingdom, was alive with craft of every description, from the majestic Dreadnought of His Majesty King George down to the tiniest of wherries. All was movement and bustle; energy and abounding life were to be seen on every hand. The town, rising in tiers on the hill whose configuration is roughly that of an amphitheatre, is striking in appearance, pleasing to the eye, and unlike many other towns farther south, at a distance without offence

to the olfactory senses. It stretches along the shore from south to north, as far as the eye can see; and with its handsome Town Hall, seen to advantage from the sea, its fine Fish Mart, its well kept Esplanade, and the houses to the south standing actually in the sea, the town presents an appearance so strikingly different to that which a stranger expects, that astonishment gives place to admiration. The sea-gulls—of a very large species—hovering round, uttering their shrill cries, the mellow tones of some of the steam whistles used on steamers, the constant hurrying to and fro in the harbour of pinnaces, fishing craft, and steamers; the peasants coming and going to the neighbouring Isle of Bressay on their homely commercial enterprise; the sight—a melancholy one—of a vessel lying submerged, and another lying ashore; the brilliant sea, the blue sky, the life-giving ozone—”

“Jirry Laurenson, will du stop?”

“Weel, I’m readin what da man says. Did-na du tell me ta du dat?”

“I did. Bit I did not raelly tink at men wis sic awfil fules as dey ir.”

“Weel, as ta dat, dir differences o opinion. Whin weemen is young, I’m noticed, an dir lookin fur a man, dey tink at aa da men is splendid. Of coorse, I will not say, bit efter da weemen is fixed, dey sometimes change dir opinion. Bit da men wis da same aall da time. Dey never change.”

“Dey certainly never get ony mair wit, dat is true, nae maiter hoo lang dey live. Na, dir men an men; bit raelly an truly, I never heard sic a screed o dirt as yon in mi life. An dan yon’s a

report! I harly tink he's mentioned paets yet, an yet he's rüdid an written da most o a book."

"Woman, he's no gotten ashore fae da steamer yet. We'll no see a paet fur anidder hunder pages."

"Well, dan, I'll hae no more o her. Dir plenty o richt books ta read, instead o wastin time ower da laek o yon. Meggie is gotten a man, in heth."

"I toucht at Meggie wid pit some sense intil him; bit as du knows as weel as I, shu's no hed muckle time yet."

"If da sense is not in him bi Natir, nedder Meggie or ony idder person 'ill du muckle ta pit it in. Not even a woman can mak a silk purse oot o a soo's lug."

"No; an da Ethiopian doesna change his skin, dey say, or da leopard his spots. Bit I toucht, bi what weemen said, at dey hed what books caa a educative influence ipun men."

"An so dey do, an so dey wid need. Bit dey most hae somethin ta wirk ipun. Na, na, lay yon by, fur Gude sake. If du wants somethin ta read, dir nothin better as da Bible, an dir muckle need fur her ta be read."

"True is dat. Bit dir wan piece here I'll hae ta read dee—a piece away aboot da middle, at I tink raelly is a great fun. It juist shaws what a baand o fules is in dis world. Let me see. I made a mark in her. Page 234. Here shu is. Noo, I'll read her wird fur wird:—

"It has to be pointed out that those gentlemen who composed the Commission, although well

known for their business qualifications, wide experience of affairs, and high intellectual attainments, had no particular knowledge of the peat industry. They were, in fact, appointed to acquire information regarding that interesting industry. Naturally, they lost no opportunity of doing so, eliciting information from those who knew, and going so far as to take suggestions from those who thought they knew. As showing the thorough manner in which the Commission went about their work, an instance may be recorded. It happened in a district famous for its peats. It happened also, I may add, when one of the Commission, an individual known as the Practical Member, was absent on other duties. An officer in His Majesty's service who was there at the time, and who had a large body of men under his command engaged in strenuous and onerous duties from early morning till dewy eve, practically without a break,—this officer, knowing our mission, got into touch with us, and, the shortage of fuel and the paramount necessity for increasing supplies being the nation's dominant need at the moment, generously and patriotically offered his own assistance and that of the men under him in carrying out an experiment which had suggested itself to him. Briefly, his idea was this:—Fuel, in the shape of peat, is wanted immediately; therefore get it immediately. Have it ready for shipment in twenty-four hours. Here is peat-moor; here are men. Get the implements; set to work, and the thing is done. Six men to prepare the moor, six to cut the peats, six to stack them. In one day the whole operation can be performed. It

has to be said, that the men, when this mode of procedure was unfolded to them, did not seem to favour it as being practicable. They, however, said nothing; their duty was but to obey. The squad of eighteen men were set to work. No time was lost; under military discipline the work proceeded rapidly. As one squad finished its allotted task, the other followed. The cleaning of the moor and the cutting presented no difficulty—that work was soon accomplished. It was only when the stackers came to perform their task that matters bore a dubious aspect. It was seen that the peats could not be satisfactorily stacked, for the simple reason that they were quite wet. Military discipline, which accomplishes so much, could not, it was found, overcome Nature. Notwithstanding all the efforts of the men, who, wet with perspiration and with grimy hands, strove to build the newly-made peats into a stack, the experiment, after three hours' constant work, was found to be a failure. The nicely-cut peats, in fact, were lying in a heap of rubbish. The officer, who was greatly disappointed at witnessing the failure of his enterprise, marched his men back to barracks, after receiving our hearty thanks for his efforts to help us, and for his anxiety to meet the nation's need in producing fuel at lightning speed. This incident is mentioned as indicative of the thorough and painstaking manner in which the Peat Commission fulfilled the duties devolving upon them. No opportunity of acquiring information was lost; no suggestion ruled out as being impracticable or impossible. 'What tinks du o dat?'

“ What tink I o dat? I juist tink da sam as I’m toucht aa mi life. If dir ony senseless thing ta be don, or cairied oot, you most get men ta du it. Fae Parliament doon dir aa da sam. Witless; witless; heels ower head.”

“ So. Noo at weemen is goin into Parliament demsells, we’ll hae everything richt, I hae nae doot. Aa we’ll hae ta du ’ill be ta sit hom an smok wir pipes. Heth, it widna be a bad idee fur me ta go inta Parliament mesell. I don know. Dir as big fules dere as me.”

“ Yiss, bit we want nae mair fules dere. Dir plenty afore du goes. An does du mean ta tell me at dir goin ta print yon screed?”

“ Dat’s da idee. Of coorse, da chairman is sent it ta me ta aks my opinion. He haes ta send it ta aa da rest, an aks dir opinion too. Dir some bits in it richt anof. He gies wird fur wird aa at went on at da tree sittins; whaur we went; da mileage we ran; an a great lok aboot da different sizes o paets, an da kind o dem, hoo dir cut, wi his wye o it. Bit I dont tink, mesell, at onyeen can get muckle sense oot o it.”

“ Dey can get no sense oot o it, fur dir no sense pitten in it. No, no; if du haes ta signd onything, an pit dy name til it, it ’ill need ta be set doon wi some kind o wit. Hoo mony pages haes he yunder?”

“ Lat’s see. Four hunder an twinty-two.”

“ Weel, if you canna set doon aa at you hae to say in wan hunder an twinty-two, I’s say little fur you. No, da best at du can do is ta go ta da schulemester, an atween you draw up somethin o

sense, an send it ta dem. Mr Sylvester can mak a fule o himsell, bit he's no gaen ta mak a fule o dee."

"Of coorse, dis is only what dey caa a interim report, du knows; fur we hae a lok ta du yet. We hae ta go ta Orkna, an Caithness, an Sutherland, afore we're don; an dat 'ill tak twa or tree year yet."

"Interim or no, I'm tellin dee at dy name does-na go ta da laek o yon. Aa you hae ta du is ta say what haes ta be said, an no palaver aboot it. An set it doon in sic a wye at onybody can understand it."

"I wiss I hed da Tittie here. Shu an me could mak up a good report, I believe. Dir ower muckle rüde wi dis man, I most say."

"Do doesna need da Tittie, as du caas her, or ony idder woman, aboot dee. If du winna geng ta da schulemaister, juist du it deeself. I canna pit it doon; bit I can shune ken what's wrang, an what's richt."

"Weel, we'll hae ta send her aff ithin a week, da chairman says."

"Do haes nothin else ta du. So set til her, an mak some kind o a job o it. Laeve in what's richt, and cut oot what's wrang."

"Yiss, bit dat's aesier said as don. Hooever, I'll hae ta try an du somethin. We'll hae ta send Joanie ower ta da shop fur some paper, an mak a be-ginnin."

"Weel, an hoo haes du gotten on?" asked Betty, the next evening.

"Juist kind o middlin, I tink, alto I'm no

aatagedder ill-pleased wi what I'm don. Dis writtin is no sae aesy as it looks, I can tell dee. It is not. I'm taen as lang ta write a dizzen pages aboot da paets as I wid a taen ta cast a guid paet bank. Da richt spellin o it, I can tell dee, is cost me a lot o wark."

"Weel, its every man til his trade, dey say. What's du pitten doon?"

"Dis is what I say. Of coorse du haes ta mind at I'm writing ta Parlimint. I say—Gentlemen,—After you had appointed the Commission to investigate (I toucht dat wis a very good wird, 'investigate') the peats, the Commission met at Lerwick at four different times to make all their plans, and after getting ready they set out for Hillswick to learn all they could on the spot. We held a sitting in the church at Hillswick, and examined some witnesses. The Chairman was anxious to find out what a peat was, what was the length of it, and the breadth of it, and the thickness. Then he wanted to know how many peats a man could cut or cast, as the people call it, in a day of ten hours. Then some members of the Commission wanted to know how many peats was needed to fire a crofter's house for a year. Nobody could tell this either, for some folk is hard upon the peats, and some has two fires, and some has sometimes three, and some only one. One man said forty 'roogs,' and when he was asked how many peats was in a roog, he could not tell. This was all that was done at the first sitting."

"Heth, it wisna muckle," said Betty. "No, it was not. Bit it juist gae dem a idee what a difficult thing paets is ta finn oot aboot."

I go on—‘ Next day the Commission tried to cut peats, just to see how the thing was done, and to get, as some said, an object lesson of the peat trade. I have to say, for myself, that they did not make a good job of casting peats; they only spoiled some good moor; but they learned a lot about peats. They found out that peats is hard work, and that they have to be trained to it. Then after a week’s rest, another sitting was held, and more people asked to tell all they knew about peats, but I don’t think anything more was found out, except that there is peats of different kinds—black peats, mossy peats, mixed peats, and horse flesh. Then the Commission left Hillswick and went to Yell, which is all peat, and held a sitting at Cullivoe, in the church. Nobody could tell anything more there about peats than in Hillswick, except that some of them was cut very thick, and the folk thought that if the Government would make a road to every peat bank, it would help them very much. There is plenty of peats in Yell—some moor forty feet deep; and some people say that it would be a good thing for the Government to take the whole of Yell and set up machines to make peats and send them away, because there is moor there that could produce peats for the whole nation for a long time. The Yell folk could work the machines, and being paid by the Government at £4 a week and six hours a day, and a holiday every quarter, some of them would be better off than they are now. What tinks du o dat?’

“ It’s no sae bad. Is yon da whole?’”

“ Very near.”

“ Weel, its short, an it tells da truth; bit it shaws at you micht as weel a sitten whaar ye wir as far as finnin oot about peats is concerned. Aa at du says yunder is at you’re funn oot nothin.”

“ Weel, dat’s about da fak. Bit da Commission, du sees, wis appointed, an we hae ta du an say somethin, fur da money. Of coorse, dis is what dey caa a minority report, du knows.”

“ What’s dat?”

“ Dat’s a report pitten in be wan, or maybe twa, at doesna agree wi da rest. We toucht at Mr Sylvister wis ower lang winded wi his report. He never cam ta da point, an I’m goin ta pit dis ta da Chairman as giein my idee o’ what da thing sood be. Laekly he’ll not tak mine aategedder. Bit he’ll get somethin oot o it. I go on—‘ After going over the peat moors and bogs of Yell, the Commission left for London, and has now much pleasure in presenting its first report. The Commission came to think, after the time spent in Shetland, that if peats could be well cut and properly dried, and provided to the public at a very cheap rate, some of them would use them, for they are very clean and give out a good heat, and if a person sits alongside of the fire and keeps putting them on, they could in lots of ways take the place of coal. But they need to be cheap. And the Commission thinks that it would be a good thing if the Government did the same with peats as they did with flour in the war—let the people have cheap peats at the expense of the Government. The Government could have special steamers and railways and lorries to put the peats to the people’s doors at a cheap rate; and this

would be a blessing to the nation. Yours truly,
Jeremiah Laurenson."

"Now, alto I say it meself, I don't think dats bad. It cost me a lok o trouble, ta pit dat doon; an fur wan ats don more spaekin as writin in mi life, I think shu's not sae bad on the whole."

"I dunna ken what dey'll tink o it. I ken what I wid do if I was da Governmint."

"What wid du do?"

"Disbaand da Paet Commission at wance, an tell dem ta go and do some useful wark."

"Its a good job du's no da Govermint, I can tell dee. Most o da Commission widna thank dee. Dey hae a lok ta du yit. Noo, I winder if I could get dis typid? A thing alwis looks better don bi yon typewriters."

"Du could aks da shop."

"Yiss, I tink I will. Of coorse, I'll pey dem fur it. And dan I'll write twartree wirds ta da Chairman bi mi ain haand, an get da thing sent aff da moarn."

"I haed a fine letter fae da Chairman dis moarnin," said the P. M., eight days afterwards. "Efter readin her, shu minds me at whin I wis at da shōp o Hillswick gettin my Report typid oot, I met Laura Maikimson. Of coorse Laura wis aksin aboot da Commission; hoo lang dey wir gaen ta carry on, and so on. Shu's no gottin Erty fixed on her yet."

"Na, and never will," replied Betty.

"I don know; it's hard ta say what'll happen. Da Chairman spaeks o twartree year yet."

"What does he say?"

“ He writes a braa lang letter. Lat me see. He says—‘ My dear Mr Laurenson,—I duly received yours of the 19th inst., with accompanying Report drawn up by yourself. Your Report is a model of brevity and lucidity. It perhaps errs in this respect. A good deal more can be said without going the length of the extreme verbosity and irrelevance so conspicuous in Mr Sylvester’s Report. All the evidence of the witnesses will have to be given in full, together with a narrative of what took place, the number of miles traversed by the members of the Commission, statistics that have already been tabulated, and whatever interesting information regarding the places visited has been gathered during our journeying in your romantic isles. Parliament naturally looks for a report of some volume as a return for the money voted and expended; and although the information we have acquired is not, in the nature of things, as yet very extensive, we hope to add to our stock of knowledge in the future by exact observation, and careful sifting of evidence. Meantime, it is our duty to present a Report of such a nature as will impress the Legislature with the importance of the matter.

‘ I have, I may say, given both Reports to the Clerk with instructions to make full use of them in drawing up another—reducing Mr Sylvester’s and expanding your own, and writing it in the usual style of these documents. When this is ready, I will have much pleasure in sending you a draft copy.

‘ I may add that, as far as present plans have been made, during the present summer we will commence activities in Orkney, where the peat industry

presents several interesting features different from those prevailing in Shetland. After Orkney (which will need the whole summer), we will proceed to Caithness; but whether we will be able to do that County and Sutherland in one season or not, I am not in a position to say.

'The members of the Commission are widely scattered at present, all being on holiday. The only one I am in personal touch with is the Clerk, who is living not far from here. By the beginning of April I will issue instructions to the various members as to our next meeting-place, and we will then resume our duties. Meanwhile I hope you are enjoying a restful holiday, and feeling the better of it. Please convey my warmest regards to Mrs Laurenson and accept the same to yourself.—I am, yours faithfully.'

"Noo, du sees, he tinks a braa lok o my Report. Ower short, maybe; bit a model, he says, a model. I don know, though, whidder I'll follow dem efter Orkna ta yon idder places."

"Du'll go if dir goin, if du's able ta geng; an I see nothin ta hinder dee. Da money is juist as weel in wir pockets as in some idder folks, an I ken, we'll mak a better use o it as mony a wan."

"Dir somethin in dat. Dir Mary an Joanie ta be tocht aboot, ta see what can be don ta help dem on a bit, an free dem frae vargin wi a croft. Mary is gotten idees, I can tell dee; an I hae idees o mi nown aboot Joanie. We'll see; we'll see. Aa da sam, I tink I'll geng ower an see hoo Erty is, and hoo he's gettin on. I wid laek ta hae a crack wi Erty."

“Mind not a wurd ta Lowra aboot what da Commission is goin ta do, or whaar dir gcin.”

“Na, na; not wan. Come away, Spark, we’ll hae a bit a walk.”

CHAPTER LXVIII.

(Conclusion).

'Ten years had passed. Much had happened in that time; many changes had taken place. The Peat Commission had visited Orkney, Sutherland and Caithness, and had heard evidence from numerous witnesses regarding the peat industry. A considerable amount of interesting information had been gathered during the two years spent in these countries; and as a result of the investigations made from the time of appointment till its labours came to a close, the Commission had issued three Blue-books, giving in full detail a narrative of their proceedings, with a Supplementary Volume of elaborate statistics. At all the sittings of the Commission the P. M. had attended. His interest in the work of the Commission was as keen throughout the whole of its existence, up to the very end, as it was on the day he first took up duties, and although the body had now been out of being for some years, during the spare hours he now had, nothing gave him greater pleasure than to take down from the bookshelf one by one the four volumes—which he had got specially bound—and sit and read and re-read the story, and pore over the statistics. Jerry had more time to himself in the evening of his life

than he had had in the active and strenuous days of his youth and manhood; and outside the work of the croft, which he and Betty carried on both from habit and because neither was happy unless fully occupied, the Report of the Peat Commission was his special interest and hobby. For hours he would sit and calculate and re-calculate; add, subtract, and multiply many of the figures given; for he was not satisfied as to their correctness. In vain, however, did he appeal to Betty to interest herself in these efforts to arrive at the exact truth. She had no head for figures, she was the first to admit. "Shu hed somethin more ta think aboot," she would say, "as wastin brain an time finnin oot hoo mony paets wis in a bank, or hoo mony oors a man took ta cast her, or a woman ta raise her. Shu hed da animals ta look efter, an da maet ta mak, an a hunder things ta du at men kent nothin aboot." With the Bible, Robinson Crusoe, Burns, all of which he re-read, and in all of which he discovered new beauties, and the Report of the Peat Commission, together with current newspapers, local and national, Jerry's time never hung heavily on his hands. He was always fully interested, morning, noon, and evening, with something or other. He and his good wife took a neighbourly and warm interest in all that went on around them; letters from Mary and Joanie, both now far away from the home of their youth, and other members of the family, regularly came to hand, and had to be as regularly answered; and the letters that came every now and then from the Tittie and a few other members of the Commission formed another

source of interest. Thus the couple, though now left to themselves, were never really alone. They never felt derelict, or stranded on the shore of life's sea. They had so many stakes in the world, so many interests round about and outside themselves, that they lived a full, if quiet and uneventful life, which, however, was brightened by visits every now and then from some at least of their loved ones.

Events at home in these later years had moved in that slow, quiet way characteristic of Shetland country life. One here, one there; some old, some young, had passed away; several well-kent faces had disappeared for ever. Among these were Erty and Laura Maikomson. Erty had gone first. "He took til his bed," as Laura put it, "wi a host at wis laek ta shak him ta bits, an as da cough bettered he warsened. Dan he lay awfil whiet. He never complained; an he harly ever spak; an he juist würe awa in his sleep." The men who accompanied Erty's remains to their last resting-place said little to each other from the time they met till each went his several way home. Erty was too well respected deep down in their hearts, too well loved, to call for words. They knew they would miss until their dying day his cheery smile and happy face, his quiet, manly ways; and that many a parish would be searched in vain to find a higher and truer type of character. Laura was quiet and subdued after her husband's death. She felt more ill at ease in the atmosphere of his departed spirit than she had ever felt in his bodily presence; for she could not but reflect that in her anxiety to push ahead and get on, and her irritation at his easy-

going ways and want of energy, she had often said and done many things she was now ashamed of. Not many months after Erty's funeral, another took place from the same house; and Lowra was laid at the side of her husband. Clemie Twatt and Willa Biglan were still old maids; still doing the usual allotted daily task, but neither of them soured or ill-tempered.

Farther afield, events had moved, in regard to some individuals with whom we are concerned, with dramatic swiftness. Mary, whose passion was music, and who had been for five years under a teacher in London and had been a student for three years at the Royal Academy with the view of training for the profession, had, to the surprise of her friends suddenly apprised them that she was about to marry. A fellow-student, an American, had fallen in love with her, and she with him; and with that beautiful disregard for practical affairs for which musicians are famous, they had decided to join hands, go to America, and make their fortune. They joined hands; they went to America; but the fortune did not come quite as quickly as they anticipated. However, they were doing very well. Both were capable, hard-working, and enthusiastic; and these attributes remove big mountains. Joanie was preparing for the scholastic profession, and within a reasonable time hoped to get charge of a school, perhaps in Shetland, and thus be able to be near the old folks.

The Tittie had married, shortly after the Peat Commission finished its labours, the man of her choice, in the way and in the place that her heart

desired. Her dear, dear friend, Jerry, whom she loved with her whole heart, was a proud man that day, when he gave her away in Hanover Square Church; and a prouder man still when he got a letter from her a year afterwards informing him that she was the happy mother of a lovely boy, whom she meant to name after him. "Yae, yae, dir aa prood o da boys. I expec he'll be a boanie bit o a bairn, fur da Tittie is a fine-lookin woman, an da man is no bad at aall. I hear nae wurd o Meggie, though," he said to Betty, after reading her the letter.

"I expec Meggie haes mair sense as ta be budderin wi bairns at her time o life."

"Weel, it maybe is troo sense, but I widna be aatagedder too sure aboot dat. No, no. I wid not."

The P. M. kept up a regular correspondence with the Tittie—that is to say, letters were exchanged between them about once a month. The Tittie's home was in Cornwall; Meggie's in Kent; Mary's in Chicago; and Joanie's in Edinburgh. The four people, therefore, in whom Jerry and Betty were the most interested were rather widely separated, and had few opportunities of seeing each other, or the old people. Joanie regularly came home on holiday, and enjoyed the change, which did him a world of good, for he was fond of fishing and all outdoor sports. These were the days that put new life into Betty; that was the one time in the year when she felt almost young again. And, needless to say, both Betty and Jerry were overjoyed when the Tittie and her husband came, as they did every

summer, to see their dear friends at Eshaness, bringing with them the "lovely bairn," as Jerry called him, and "da darling peerie daatie," in Betty's even more endearing language. And when Mary arrived, one fine day, with her boy, and next year the Tittie brought her "peerie ting o lass" with the golden hair and the eyes of blue, "sae laek her midder," their cup of joy was full to overflowing.

[THE END.]

